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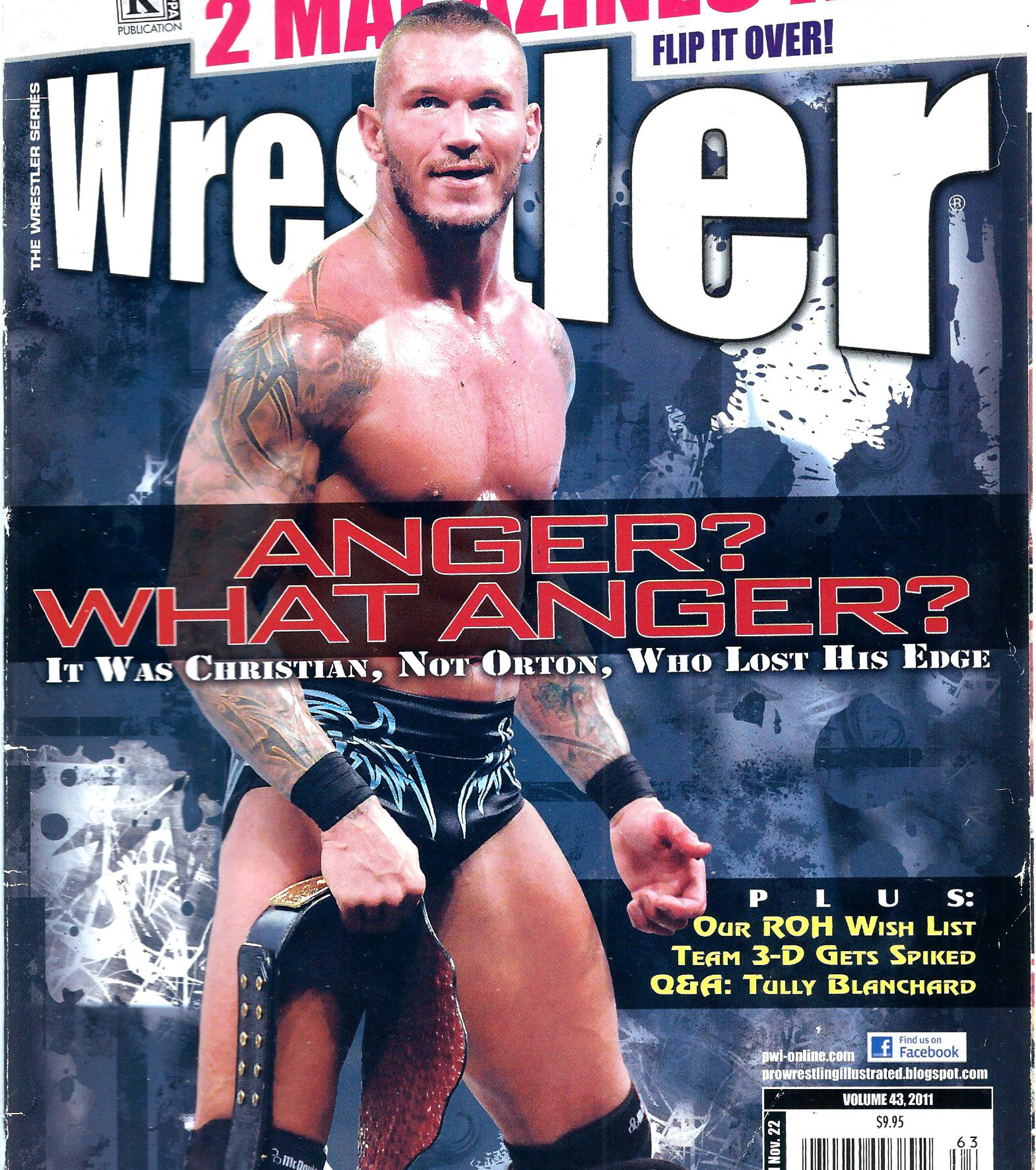

ANGER? WHAT ANGER?

IT WAS CHRISTIAN, NOT ORTON, WHO LOST HIS EDGE

PLUS:

- OUR ROH WISH LIST
- TEAM 3-D GETS SPIKED
- Q&A: TULLY BLANCHARD

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GEORGE NAPOLITANO

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SAM WEYANT

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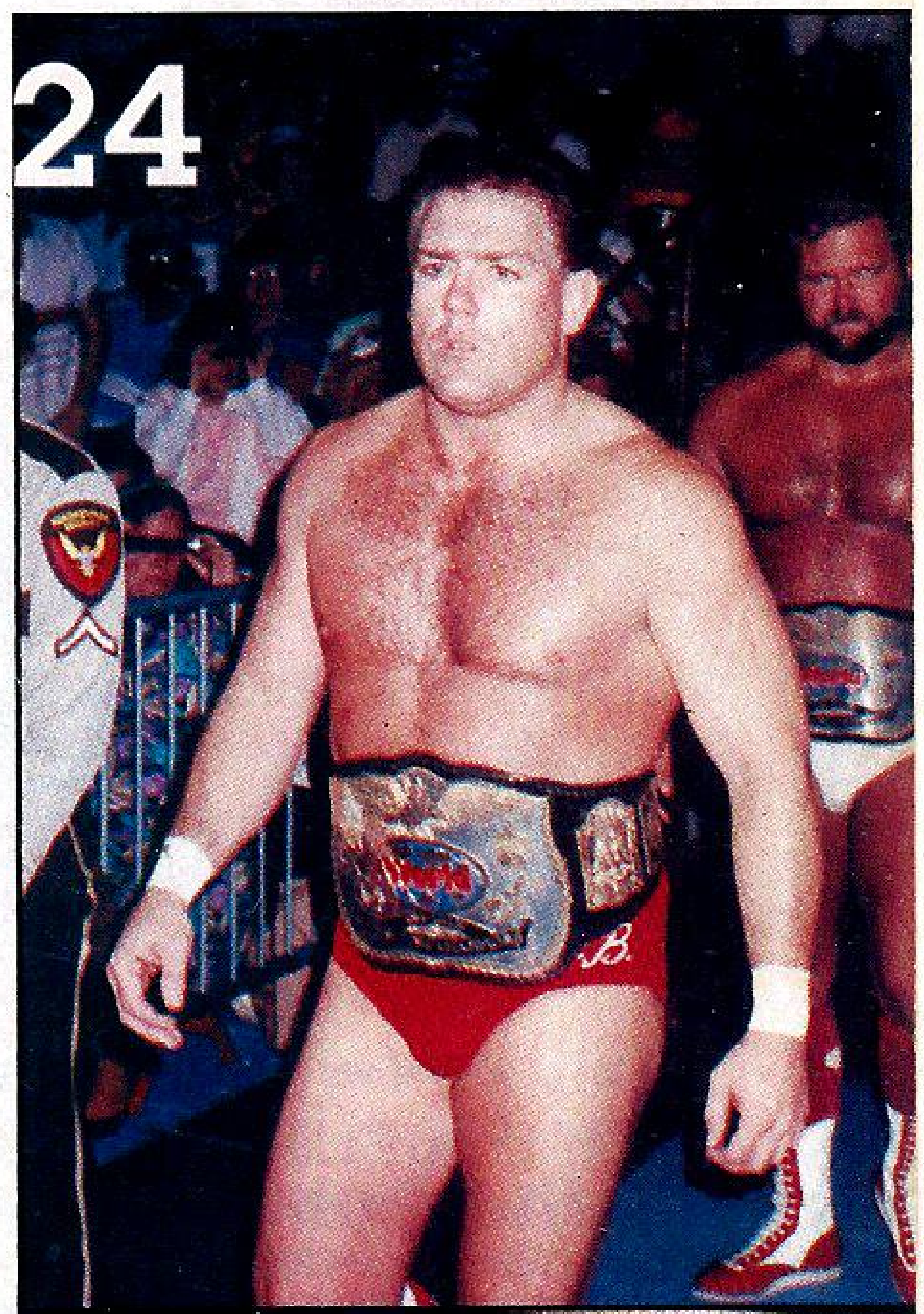

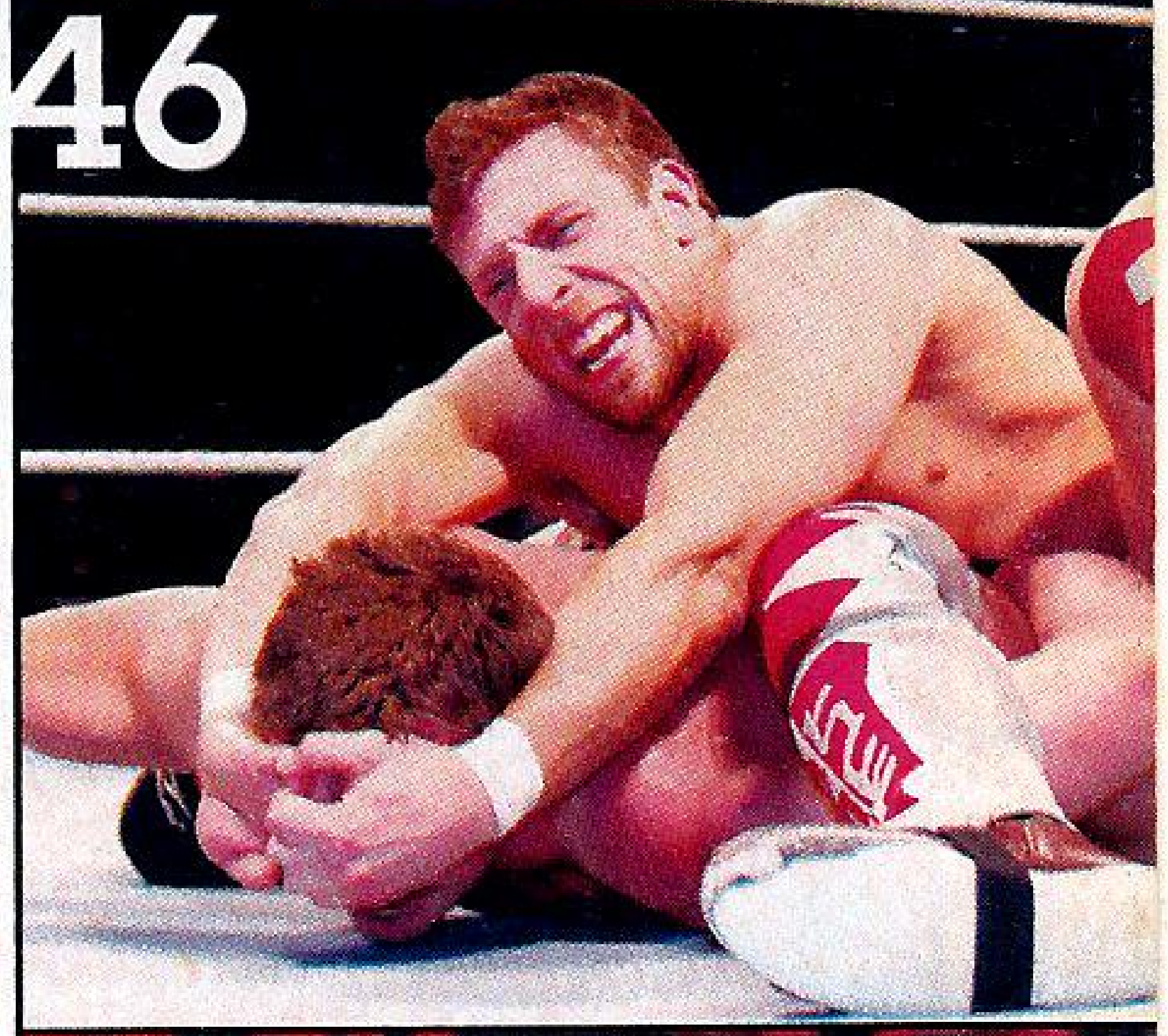

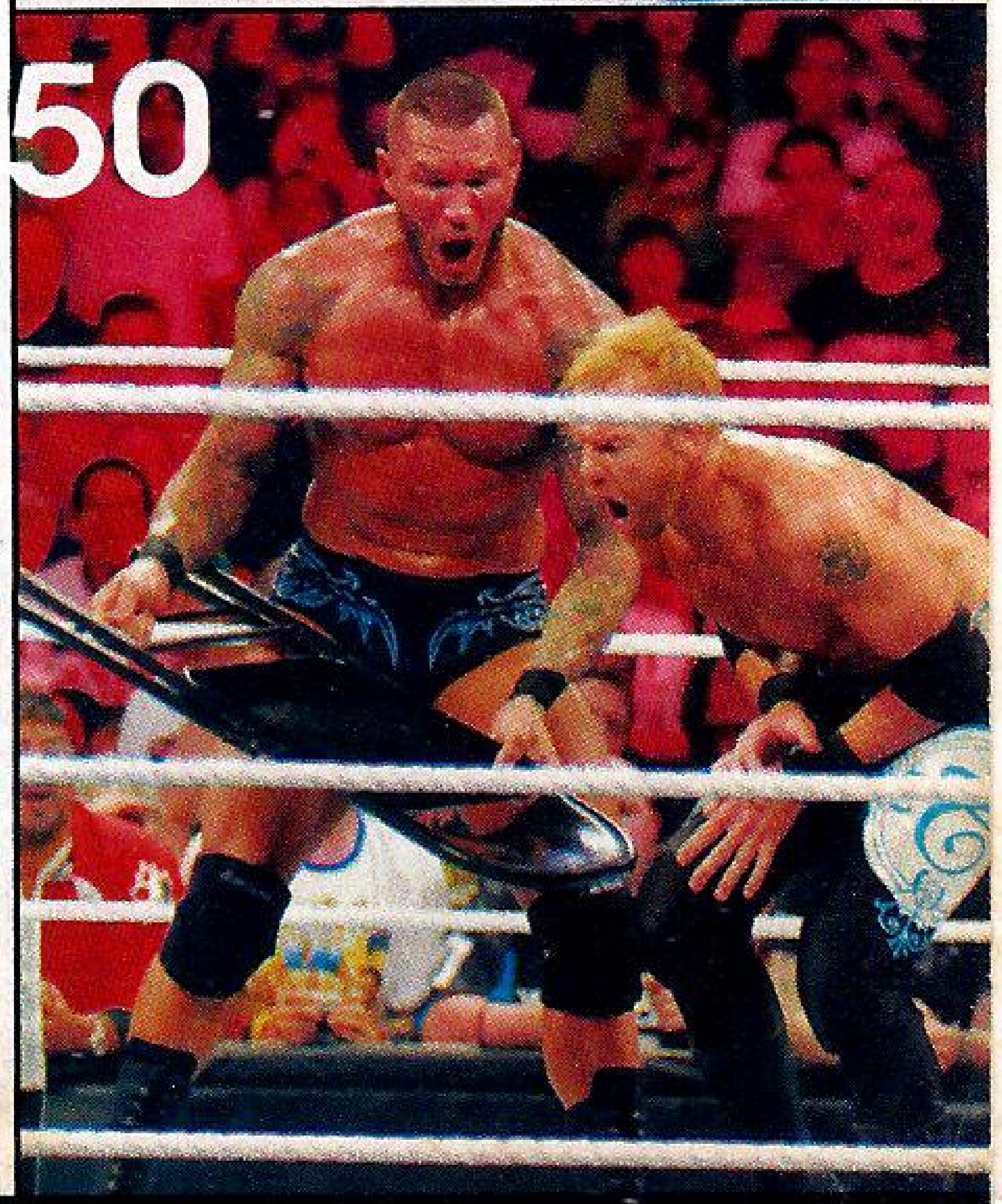

Look for the Volume 44, 2012 issue of *The Wrestler/Inside Wrestling*, on sale November 22, 2011

YOUR LETTERS

KNEW IT ALL ALONG

I want to give a great, big congratulations to Randy Orton on winning his ninth WWE world championship at SummerSlam.

I was so happy to see Edge put Christian in his place before the match, and also glad that he didn't stick around to interfere on Christian's behalf.

Christian knew he had no chance once Edge walked out of the ring, but I'll give him credit for wrestling a strong match. Still, I knew Christian could never stop Orton from regaining the title. Way to go, Randy!

ALICIA KEELER
akeelkitty97@aol.com

LIONS OR KITTENS?

What is wrong with TNA's young wrestlers? Kurt Angle and Sting are obviously great wrestlers, but why can't men like Samoa Joe, Bobby Roode, RVD, and AJ Styles find a way to beat them for the World championship?

We hear so much about TNA's "hungry, young lions," but really, they look more like pathetic kittens that have no idea how to get to and stay at the top. Even Mr. Anderson, who is an excellent wrestler, can't manage to hold on to the title for longer than a month.

RAMON BLACKWELL
Chicago, IL

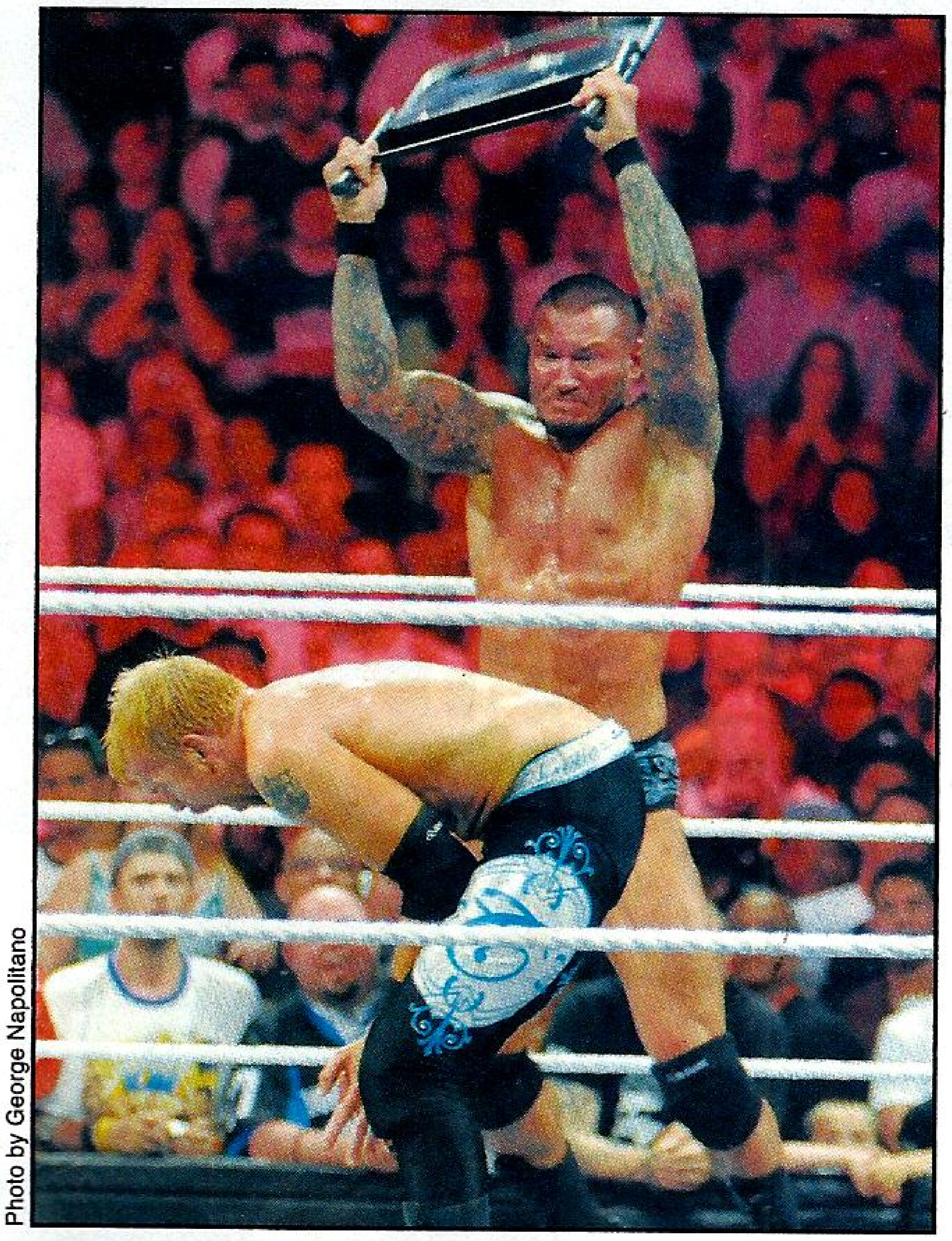

Photo by George Napolitano

It might have taken Randy Orton 23 minutes to defeat Christian for the World title at SummerSlam, but reader Alicia Keeler says she knew all along that Orton would prevail.

DEL RIO APOLOGIST

It is very easy to criticize Alberto Del Rio for the way he won the WWE championship from CM Punk at SummerSlam. However, I just want to point out that it still took a lot of talent and effort on his part to be in the position to cash in that Money in the Bank briefcase. The championship victory might have been weak, but Alberto was still impressive to that point. There is a reason why he's been in the title picture for the past six months.

Also, I wonder what people expected him to do. As Triple-H said on *Raw*, that's the nature of the MITB concept. I can't blame Del Rio for following a precedent that was set in part by Punk himself.

WOODIE MILAN
Ft. Stockton, TX

(Editor's note: Fair points, Woodie, but flip to page 56 of *Inside Wrestling*. We wonder if you'll stand by your opinion after reading the feature story on Del Rio.)

HAIL, KOFI & EVAN

I can't even begin to explain how happy I was when Evan Bourne and Kofi Kingston took the WWE tag team title from David Otunga and Michael McGillicutty on *Raw*.

I always despised The Nexus as a group and every member of it as individuals. Otunga and McGillicutty are nothing more than brainless thugs who lucked into a championship. Bourne and Kingston, on the other hand, are exciting wrestlers who take care of business in the ring with their wrestling ability, and not gang warfare.

DAVID FACENDA
Mt. Royal, NJ

THUMBS UP!

Good call on Austin Aries in Volume 42's "Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down." Simply put, Aries can wrestle circles around 75 percent of the people in the so-called "major" federations. I only hope TNA gives him the chance to prove it.

BEN D'AMICO
Newark, DE

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OR E-MAIL LETTERS TO wrestlermag@yahoo.com

MAKE UP YOUR MIND

After reading "Point/Counterpoint" in Volume 42, I have to admit that I agree with *both* Al Alven and Brady Hicks regarding whether it was proper for John Cena to pressure Vince McMahon into re-instating CM Punk a few months back.

For better or worse, Vince McMahon is (was?) the boss, and if he suspends a wrestler, nobody—certainly not another wrestler—has the right to challenge his decision. However, McMahon should be smart enough to listen to feedback from his wrestlers, especially from Cena, who is the company's biggest star. Of course, Cena didn't get the job done at SummerSlam, but it doesn't really matter because Del Rio stole the championship anyway.

Either way, your article made me think about the issue from both sides. Thanks!

LISA PAUL
Beaverton, OR

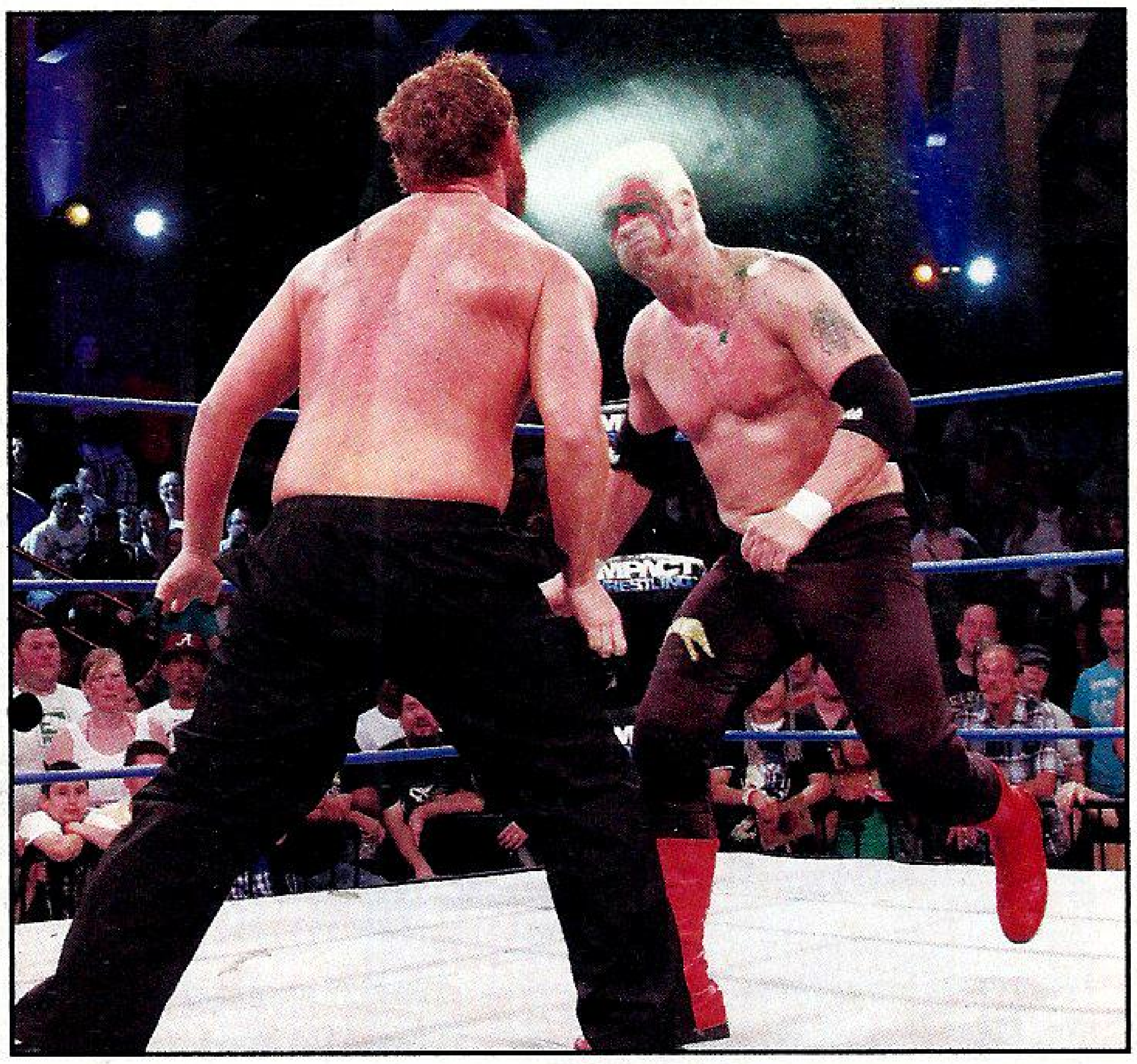
Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Mr. Anderson and Eric Young may have had some laughs dressing up as Sting and The Great Muta on *Impact Wrestling* recently, but reader Ramon Blackwell says the joke is on them and the many young wrestlers in TNA who can't seem to keep the World title away from Sting and Kurt Angle.

WHAT'S HE DOING?

What is wrong with Dolph Ziggler? He is walking away from the perfect opportunity to shed Vickie Guerrero once and for all.

It is very clear that Vickie and Jack Swagger have developed a mutual attraction, and that Vickie wants to be in Swagger's corner. Ziggler should just let her stay there. He is good enough to wrestle without her "guidance." I just can't believe Ziggler would make such a fool of himself on *Raw* by acting like a jealous boyfriend when it is so obvious that kicking Vickie to the curb would be the textbook case of addition by subtraction.

ORLANDA GONZALEZ
San Diego, CA

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Stuart M. Saks
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Frank Krewda
PRODUCTION MANAGER
Bethany Lawler
PRE-PRESS DIRECTOR
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(215) 643-6385
ckolkka@kappapublishing.com
SUBSCRIPTION INQUIRIES
Kappa Publishing Group Inc.
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WHAT'S HAPPENING

BY DAN MURPHY

THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL of **The Hardy Boys** continued as **Matt Hardy** was arrested on charges of driving while impaired on August 20.

Hardy was arrested after his 2009 Chevrolet Corvette ran off the road, striking a tree in Monroe County, North Carolina. According to police reports, Hardy was speeding when the accident occurred and appeared to have taken "an impairing substance." Hardy submitted to a blood test and a court date has been scheduled for September.

A short time after the news broke—accompanied by a damning mug shot of a bleary-eyed Hardy—TNA announced his release. Both Matt and **Jeff Hardy** had been under indefinite suspension. Jeff's status with the company remains cloudy, as he is still facing drug trafficking and possession charges in a case that has been delayed for nearly a year. At press time, Jeff had not been seen in a wrestling ring since his disastrous performance against Sting at Victory Road in March.

It's difficult to predict Matt's future. The elder Hardy burned many of his bridges with WWE last fall when he went to social media and actively campaigned to be released from his contract. When he arrived in TNA, he appeared motivated and in better physical condition, but he was relegated to a mid-card role when he joined Immortal. This latest misstep will likely take a heavy toll on his career.

Adding to the backstage drama, TNA released a pair of prominent front office members in August: **Al Ovedia**, the vice president of marketing, and **Steven Godfrey**, the director of public relations.

According to some reports, **Hulk Hogan** and TNA Creative head **Vince Russo** had a heated argument backstage at Hard Justice, though the two reportedly made peace a short time later. TNA co-founder **Jerry Jarrett** sounded off on TNA in an interview with the *Charleston Post And Courier.* "Until they make radical surgical changes in creative, and unless they get some people who comprehend the wrestling business, they are doomed to be the financial drain on Panda (owner Panda Energy) that they are now and have been since inception," Jarrett said. "The core of their problems is the creative development of their product. They have to cut the cancer out."

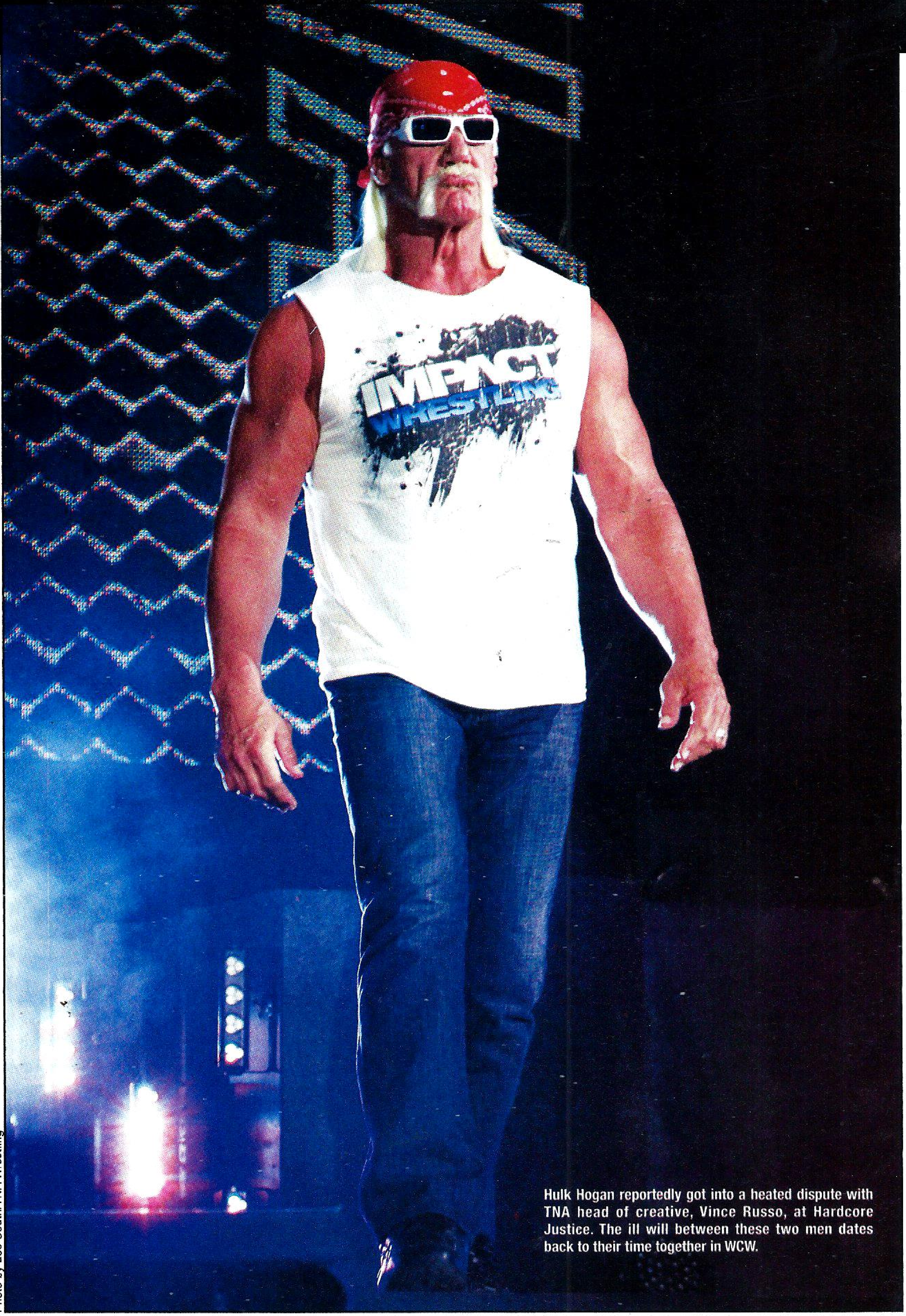
I suggest that if I've left you with a sour taste about TNA, take a deep breath and read Al Castle's "Workin' Stiff" on page 22.

In other news, the **Insane Clown Posse** hosted a truly unique wrestling event as part of its massive "Gathering Of Juggalos" festival, starting in the early morning hours of August 13. The "Legends And Icons" event featured a variety of throwback matches, giving veterans a chance to settle old scores and relive rivalries dating back decades.

Greg Valentine defeated **Tito Santana** in a steel cage match, **The Rock 'n' Roll Express** defeated **The Midnight Express** (**Dennis Condrey** & **Bobby Eaton**), **Rhino** won a multiple-man ECW alumni match (also featuring **Raven**, **Shane Douglas**, **2 Cold Scorpio**, **Mahoney**, **Sabu**, and **Al Snow**), **Bob Backlund** beat **Ken Patera**, **Austin Idol** won a Memphis streetfight over **Dutch Mantel**, **Koko B. Ware**, **Brickhouse Brown**, and **Doug Gilbert**), **Tracey Smothers** beat **Tommy**

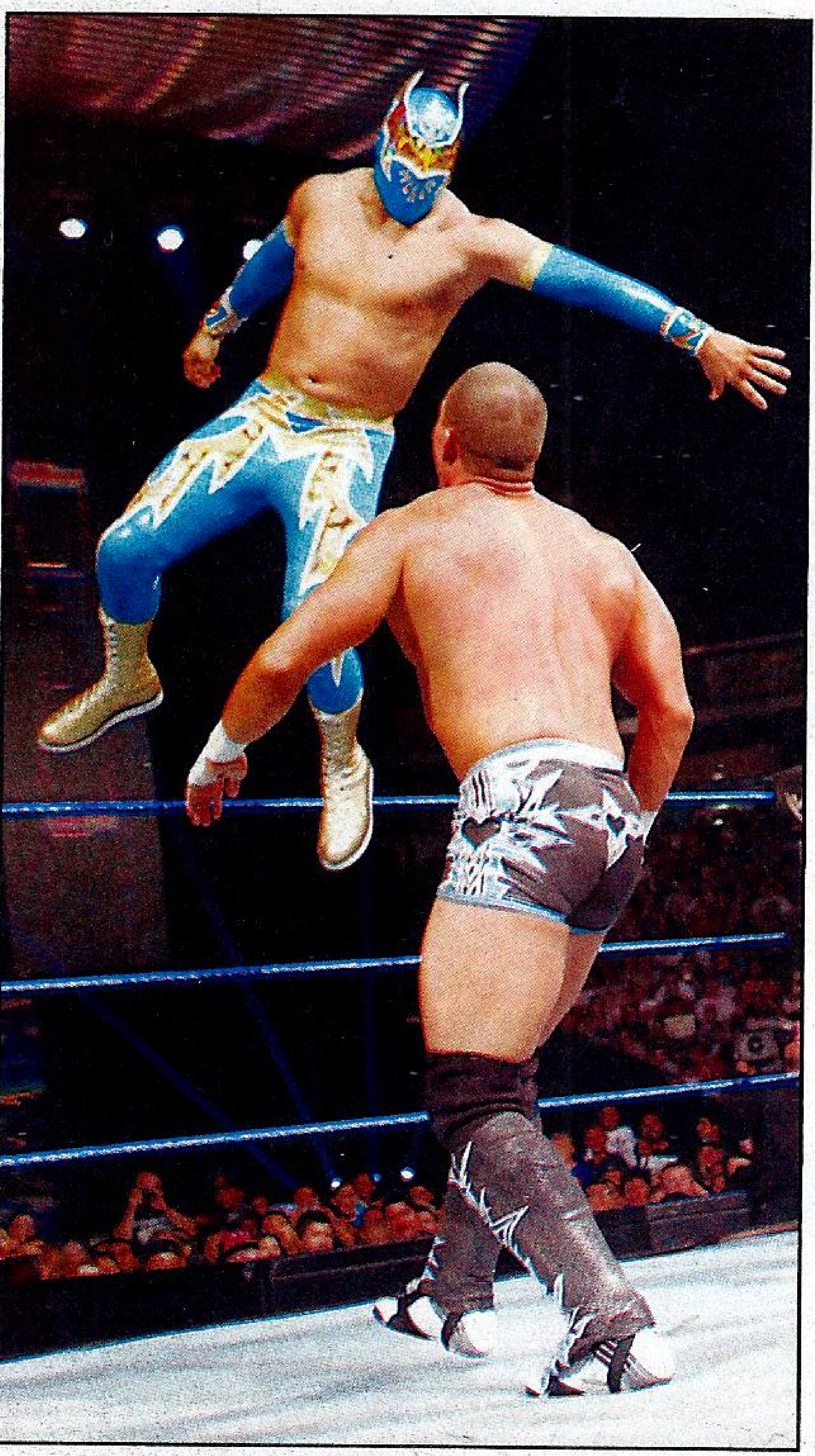
Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

TNA released Matt Hardy after he was arrested for suspicion of driving while impaired. There are few options remaining for Hardy, who has seemingly alienated himself from the top two promotions in the U.S.



Hulk Hogan reportedly got into a heated dispute with TNA head of creative, Vince Russo, at Hardcore Justice. The ill will between these two men dates back to their time together in WCW.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



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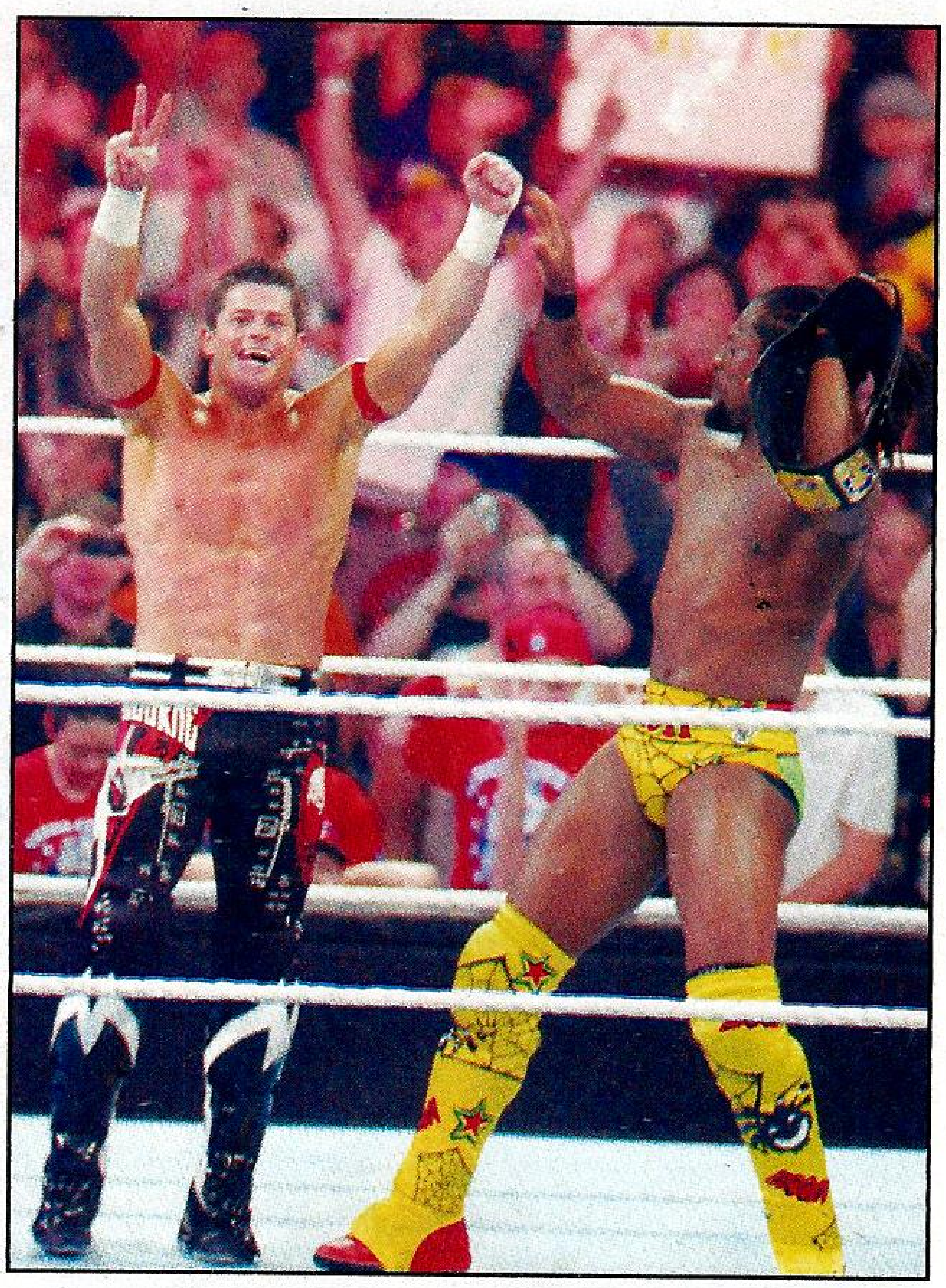
Is this Mistico as Sin Cara or Hunico as Sin Cara? It matters little to Tyson Kidd. He lost the match on *Smackdown* anyway. Rest assured, the Sin Cara we see in the ring at this point is the real deal.



Evan Bourne and Kofi Kingston caught WWE tag team champions David Otunga and Michael McGillicutty at the right time—and with the title on the line. The former Nexus members were in the midst of a losing streak of non-title matches. Evan and Kofi beat them for the title rather handily.

Rich, **Kevin Nash** and **Sean Waltman** defeated **The New Age Outlaws**, and **Roddy Piper** defeated **Terry Funk**.

Forget all about the **Under-Faker**, the **Impostor Kane**, and the infamous **Diesel** and **Razor Ramon** clones; WWE may have another doppelganger controversy on its hands. **Sin Cara** received a 30-day suspension for a violation of the WWE Wellness Policy. However, the masked man was back in action less than 30 days after the suspension was announced, with a different luchador underneath the blue and gold mask. According to reports, longtime WWE developmental wrestler **Hunico** temporarily filled in for Cara. This comes after Cara had received some mixed reviews backstage, with critics claiming he has been slow to learn the "American" wrestling style. If Cara continues to struggle in the role, it's possible that WWE may choose to have Hunico adopt the persona full-time (similar to what happened with **Max Moon** in the early-1990s and **Suicide** in TNA). Another rumor making the rounds is that we may be in for a Sin Cara-vs.-impostor Sin Cara feud.

WWE crowned new tag team champions on August 22 as **Evan Bourne** and **Kofi Kingston** upended **David Otunga** and **Michael McGillicutty** for the belts on *Raw*. Otunga and McGillicutty had lost several non-title bouts of late, and *Raw* color commentator Jerry Lawler called them "bland and boring." The dynamic team of Kingston and Bourne should certainly provide an adrenaline boost in an otherwise moribund tag team division.

Jeff Jarrett may have a firm grasp on the AAA heavyweight title, but Mexico's other main singles championship changed hands on August 12, when **Hector Garza** defeated **Ultimo Guerrero** for the CMLL heavyweight title at Arena Mexico. Garza's win ended Guerrero's reign of more than 2½ years and made Garza only the 13th man to hold the title in the 20-year history of the championship.

Rumors are swirling that **Samoa Joe** is considering jumping to WWE when his current contract with TNA runs out later this year. Joe has been with TNA since 2005, when he arrived fresh off his critically lauded run as Ring of Honor champion. Though Joe has won the TNA World title, tag title, and X division title (four times), critics contend that Joe's run in TNA has been a disappointment.

Rey Mysterio Jr. has announced that he will undergo sur-

A victim of WWE's latest cuts, Harry Smith is looking forward to working for The Smashing Pumpkins' frontman Billy Corgan's new indy promotion, Resistance Pro Wrestling.

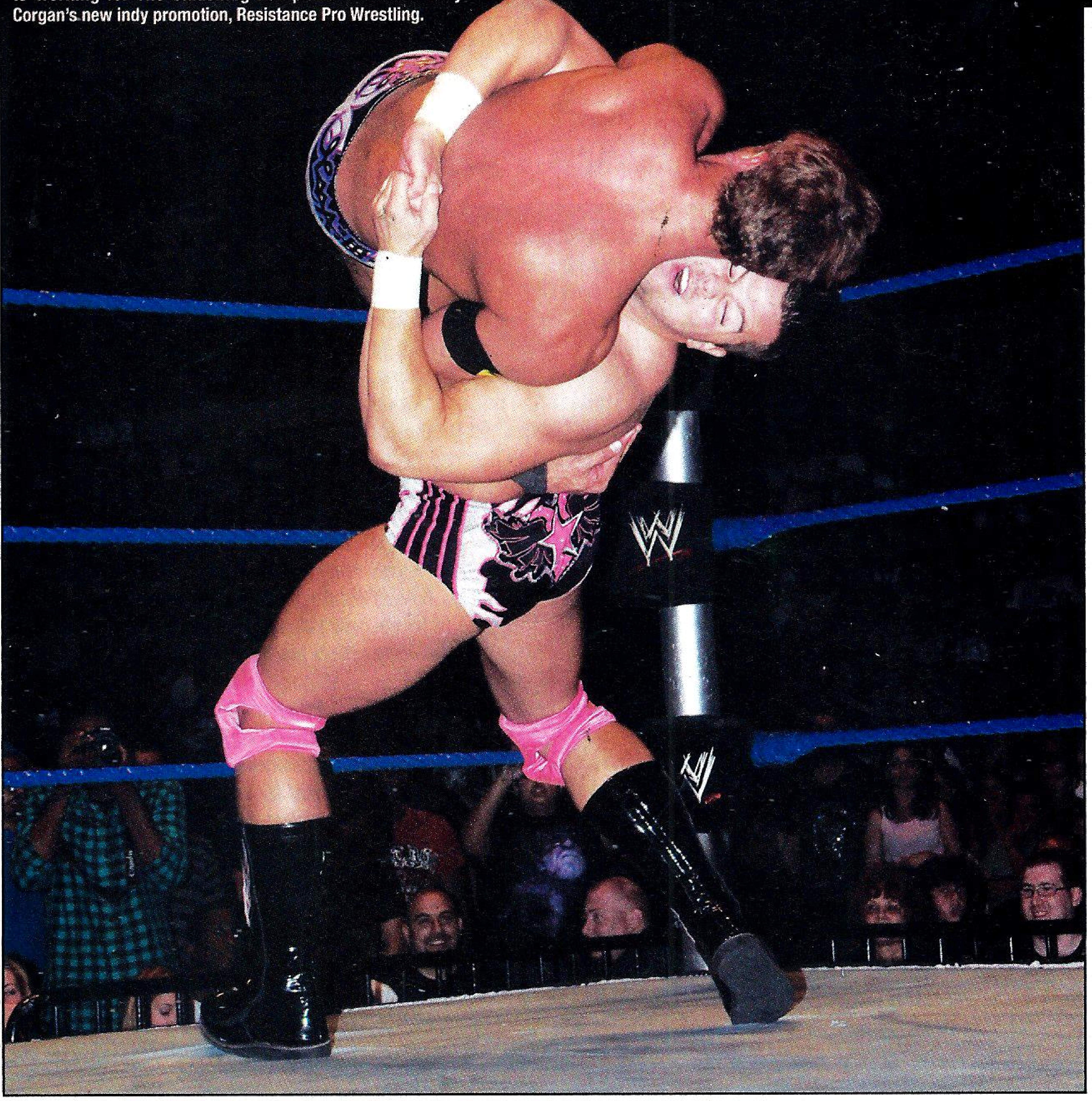


Photo by George Napolitano

gery on his knee. No information on how long he will be out of action has been made available as of press time, though it is expected he will miss at least 3-4 months.

Billy Corgan took The Smashing Pumpkins from the indy rock clubs of Chicago to a worldwide stage in the 1990s, but does the alt-rock frontman have what it takes to become a wrestling promoter? Corgan seems to think he does. He will be a principal backer of a new promotion named Resistance Pro Wrestling, which is scheduled to debut in November in Chicago. Corgan is partnering with **Jacques** and **Gabriel Baron** in the endeavor, with Corgan heading Creative and **Raven** serving as an agent. **Harry Smith** and **Teddy Hart** will appear for the new promotion.

"I believe I bring to the table a unique set of experiences from the music business that translate to how to engage a fan's deeper interest, whether it be in the ring or hopefully one day on television," Corgan said in a statement. He said he plans to promote the company actively using social media and to feature traditional wrestling, with a mix of young talent, veterans, and women performers.

Though **Eric Bischoff** is no fan of the X division *(see story on page 50 of the* **Inside Wrestling** *flipside)*, he has agreed to keep the division going. Bischoff has put in place a weight limit of 225 pounds, which should eliminate some of the one-sided mismatches involving Abyss we have seen in recent months.

Finally, congratulations go out to standout Ontario independent competitor **Jason Cypress** (formerly known as **Xtremo**). Cypress recently had a tryout with TNA. He would be an excellent addition to the X division. And don't worry, EB, he weighs well under 225. □

ON ASSIGNMENT

OVER THE YEARS, my columns have focused mostly on the sport's biggest names and news, but that doesn't mean I'm unaware of what happens away from the beaten path.

This month, I'll let Harry Burkett, Dan Murphy, and the rest of my fellow writers hash out the post-SummerSlam buzz, so that I can report on some of wrestling's less-publicized goings-on:

Far, Far North Wrestling

When Matt Morgan agreed to participate in a Maximum Pro Wrestling tour of Canada this spring, he expected he would be wrestling a couple dates near Toronto. He was only about 1,500 miles off. When his plane touched down in Iqaluit, Nunavut, a tiny, permafrost-coated city of 6,000 hardy residents high in the Canadian Arctic, Morgan was understandably surprised.

"Matt was a little shocked, but he's a great guy and a trooper. He was happy to be there," said Arda Ocal, an announcer for MPW and one of the organizers of the tour.

Ocal had made two prior visits to Nunavut in 2008 with the Blood, Sweat, and Ears promotion. That promotion eventually merged with Scott D'Amore's Border City Wrestling to become Maximum Pro, and plans were made to go back for another Arctic Classic tour.

D'Amore, Ocal, and Morgan were joined by Colt Cabana, Jimmy Jacobs, Michael Elgin, Kiyoshi, and Traci Brooks. Former WWE referee Jimmy Korderas (who co-hosts "Right After Wrestling" on The Score satellite radio in Canada) tagged along, as did John Pollock and Wai Ting of the Fight Network, who were working on a documentary of the unique trip.

"The travel wasn't horrible," Ocal said. "We met in Ottawa, and then there was a three-hour flight from there. For the two days we were there in May, it was pretty much 24 hours of daylight, which was something we had to get used to."

As for the fans, they were just as passionate as their somewhat distant neighbors to the south, with about 350 fans attending each of the two shows. To put that in perspective, that equals almost 12 percent of Iqaluit's population.

"What's cool is that our core MaxPro roster, who have been going there for every show, are recognized and cheered just as much as the name talent," Ocal said. "The fans in Iqaluit appreciate wrestling no matter what level the wrestlers are at in their careers."

Edge-ucational Opportunity

Edge's big break in wrestling sounds like it comes right from the pages of a storybook: A gangly teenager wins an essay contest presented by the local newspaper to win free wrestling training lessons.

Photo by Ashley Sixx

Members of Maximum Pro Wrestling assemble in the Canadian Artic for a photo to document its trip to an Iqualuit village, where 350 natives turned out for a pair of shows. Before you scoff at the size of the crowds, realize that 350 people represents 12 percent of the native population.

BY LIZ HUNTER

Well, Adam "Edge" Copeland made the most of those lessons at the Sweet Daddy Siki and Ron Hutchison School of Professional Wrestling, and from there, he went on to become the "Rated R Superstar," an 11-time world champion and a future Hall-of-Famer.

Now, Edge is ready to give another aspiring wrestler the same opportunity.

In celebration of its 10th anniversary, Toronto's Squared Circle Training is sponsoring an essay contest, with the winner receiving "free lifetime wrestling training" at the school. Edge himself will select the winning entry and personally present the scholarship to the contest winner.

Whoever wins the essay contest is certainly going to have his—or her—work cut out for them if they hope to follow in Edge's championship footsteps. But Rob Fuego and the crew at Squared Circle have a proven track record of churning out exceptional wrestlers, including Gail Kim, Kizarny, Taylor Wilde, and Michael Elgin.

It's also nice to see Edge's career go full-circle. As a boy, he idolized Hulk Hogan and The Ultimate Warrior. Now, some young hopeful who grew up watching Edge in action will get the same opportunity.

Edge is a great ambassador for wrestling, and a promotion like this creates goodwill for the wrestling industry. Kudos to Edge and Squared Circle for helping give back to the business.

Good Genes Run In The Family

I'll admit, I'm not as well versed on the British wrestling scene as I should be, but when you've been covering this business for as many years as I have, you begin to recognize names from all over the globe. One of those names is Sweet Saraya, an 18-year veteran of the U.K. ring wars.

I was familiar with Saraya by her reputation; she was a street-smart pistol who never backed away from a fight. She's the kind of gal who can walk into a pub by herself, drink the boys under the table, and take care of herself should a drunken hooligan try to take liberties. I always envisioned her looking like a female version of Fit Finlay.

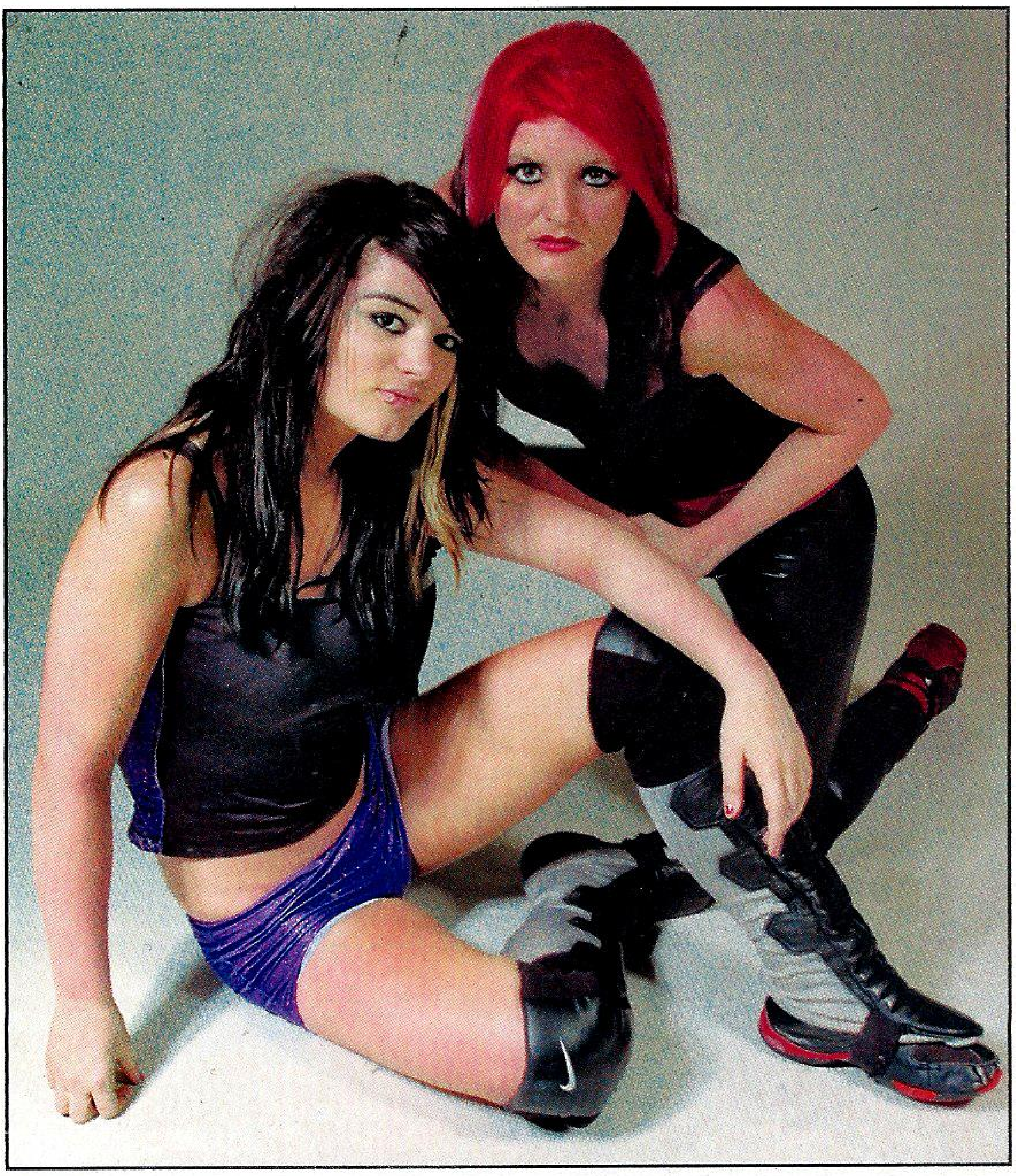


Photo by Gilda Pasquil

British grapplers Saraya (right) and Britani Knight are wrestling's only mother-daughter tandem Liz Hunter can think of. The Knight Dynasty recently appeared in SHIMMER to test some American competition.

I recently had a chance to see Saraya in person, and, wow, was my mental image off! She wrestled in SHIMMER recently, teaming with her 19-year-old daughter, Britani Knight. Now Britani is an absolute knockout, a willowy beauty with the regal beauty of a Keira Knightley or Pippa Middleton. But Mama is simply stunning herself; a slim, no-nonsense woman who can still rock a belly ring at nearly 40 years old. That, dear readers, is something yours truly wouldn't have attempted after … well, never really. But if I had a body like Saraya, I might just attempt it. There must be something in the water in Norwich, England.

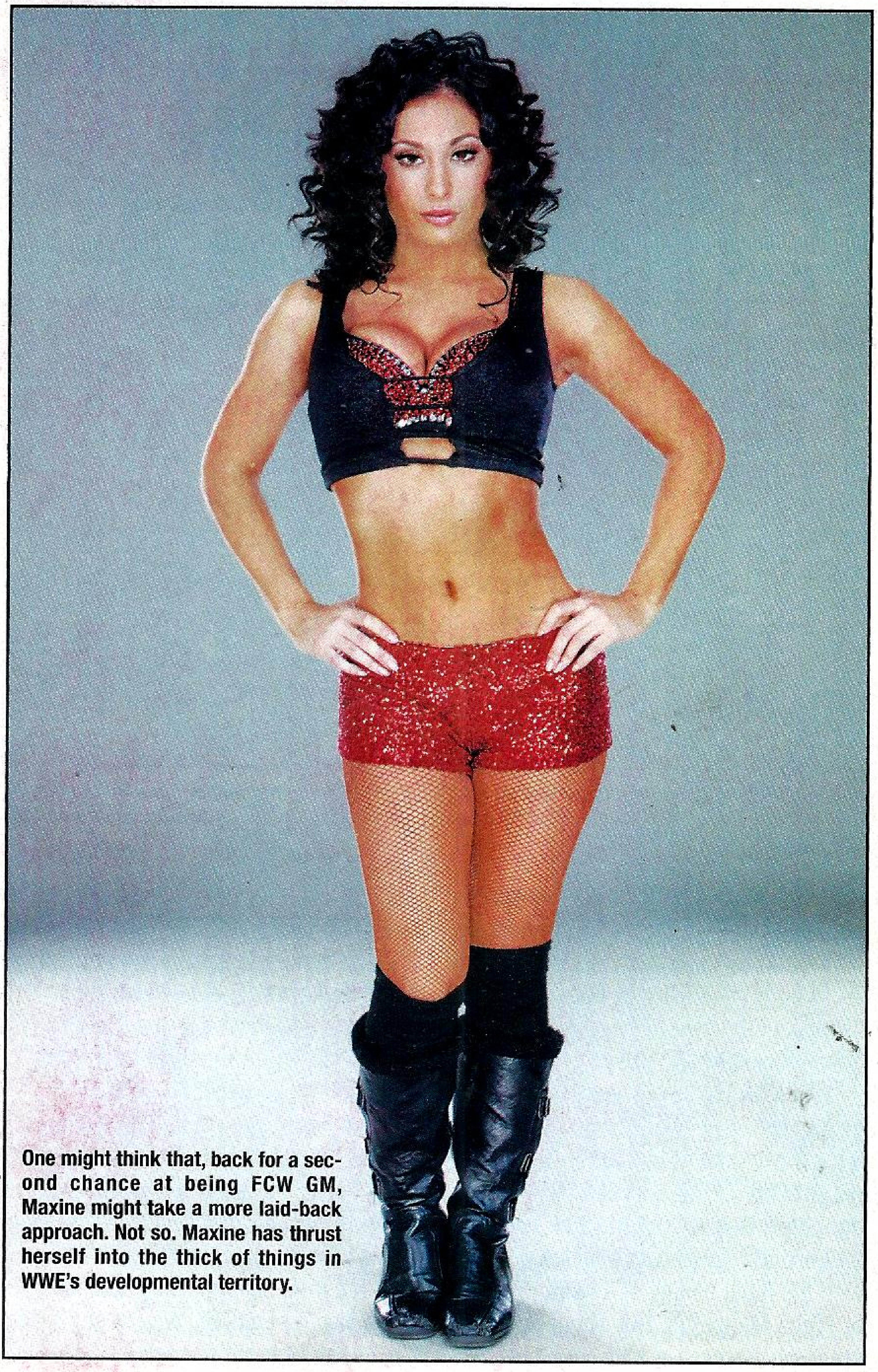
In any case, Saraya and Britani (known as The Knight Dynasty) are one heck of a tag team, and they're the first mother/daughter team I can remember seeing. And all those rumors of Saraya's toughness are true. She may be a hot mom, but she's also a scrapper. Way to go, ladies! Let's hear it for girl power! ☐

ON THE FARM

BY LOUIE DEE

AFTER BEING REINSTATED as Florida Championship Wrestling's general manager by company president Steve Keirn, Maxine wasted no time making her presence felt. Since re-assuming power over Labor Day weekend, she has already made a pair of decisions that have intensified the two biggest feuds in the promotion.

Bo Knows Winning. Maxine's first decision kept Bo Rotundo in possession of the FCW heavyweight title he has held since May, but it also made Rotundo's top challenger even more dangerous than he already was.



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One might think that, back for a second chance at being FCW GM, Maxine might take a more laid-back approach. Not so. Maxine has thrust herself into the thick of things in WWE's developmental territory.

Leo Kruger has been a thorn in Rotundo's side since receiving his first shot at the gold on the August 21 episode of *FCW TV*. Kruger looked to be in complete control when he locked the champion in a sleeperhold, but after refusing the referee's order to release when Rotundo reached the ropes, Kruger was disqualified. When he maintained the sleeper even after the DQ, Maxine ordered the release herself. Fearing a suspension, Kruger reluctantly complied.

Two weeks later, the pair battled in a non-title cage match, and Kruger won thanks to some well-timed interference from Conor O'Brian. For a third match, Maxine named former GM Norman Smiley as the special referee.

On the September 11 episode of *FCW TV*, Rotundo thought he had put an end to the Kruger threat after spearing and pinning the South African. Not so, however. Kruger attacked Smiley and once again choked out the champion after the bout, proving that their war is far from over.

Rotundo may have to deal with an assault on another front as well, this one from within his own family. Bo's brother, Husky Harris, was at his side most of the summer, but has voiced displeasure about the champion's recent alliance with Queen of FCW and FCW Divas champion Aksana, going so far as to tell Bo that Aksana "was keeping him from a WWE call-up."

Both Rotundo and Aksana resented the remark, and relations between the brothers have been strained since. This situation certainly bears watching.

Iron Men. Maxine's other decision has made the FCW 15 Title a centerpiece of the promotion ... and also may have produced the best match in FCW history.

Since arriving in FCW earlier this summer, Dean Ambrose (formerly Jon

One might also think that Husky Harris would work in the best interests of his own brother, Bo Rotundo. That may or may not be the case. Harris is doing his best to break up the relationship between Bo and Aksana.

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Moxley) has targeted FCW 15 champion (and longtime rival in the independents as Tyler Black) Seth Rollins.

In mid-August, Ambrose got his first shot at the title, but Rollins retained when the match ended in a 0-0 draw. Ambrose wasn't happy, and after a backstage confrontation, the two were given 20 minutes on the August 28 TV show. Once again, neither man scored a fall, leaving Rollins as the champion and the feud undecided after 35 minutes of action.

A third bout was scheduled for September 18, and during the contract signing the prior week, Maxine dropped a bombshell: The final bout would be a 30-minute Iron Man match.

When that bout ended in another 0-0 draw, Maxine made another great decision, sending the match into sudden-death overtime reminiscent of Bret Hart vs. Shawn Michaels at WrestleMania 12.

Unlike that match, however, it was the champion who would walk out with the gold. After more than 110 total minutes of action between the two, Rollins nailed Ambrose with God's Last Gift and secured a pinfall to win the match 1-0.

Naturally, Ambrose was not happy. He vowed to continue his quest to dethrone Rollins.

"For more than one hour now, I've proven not only that I'm good enough, but that I'm better than Seth Rollins," an irate Ambrose told "On The Farm" after the loss. "He may have gotten lucky this time, but when we meet again, I will be the FCW 15 champion!"

More Title Turmoil. The FCW tag team championship scene also had some upheaval, only this case led to a title change and the fulfillment of a lengthy quest for Donny Marlow.

Over the past year, Marlow has had several partners, but always came up short when chasing the gold. Finally, on the August 21 *FCW TV*, the right connection clicked, and in just their first match together, Marlow and CJ Parker defeated reigning champions Calvin Raines and Big E Langston to win the title.

Fittingly, it was Marlow himself who secured the championship, pinning Raines with a backslide. Moments later, the son of WWE legend Haku and his new partner unleashed a raucous celebration.

"Chocolate" Raines' attempts to regain the gold have been put on hold, as Calvin was involved in a severe automobile accident in the Tampa area just days after the loss. Luckily, Raines and the other passengers in his car walked away with mostly minor injuries.

As of press time, Raines was still out of action nursing a rib injury, and we here at "On The Farm" send out our best wishes for a speedy recovery.

Tidbits of Sunshine. Alexander Rusev also recently suffered an injury in the ring and will be out indefinitely. In the meantime, his manager, Raquel Diaz, has been seen accompanying Ricardo Rodriguez, Tito Colon, Kenneth Cameron, and Conor O'Brian in recent weeks ... Cameron and Colon have been on a winning streak in recent weeks, and may quickly become top contenders to Donny Marlow and CJ Parker. James Bronson and Erick Rowan are also in the hunt, following their non-title victory over the new champions on September 11 ... *Tough Enough* winner Andy Leavine made his *FCW TV* debut on August 21, defeating Mack Hetfield ... Richie Steamboat has been at odds with Brad Maddox and his entourage since losing to Maddox in early-August. Steamboat has had the upper hand most of the time since that loss, surviving a three-on-one assault from Maddox, Colin Cassady, and Rodney Thomas on Labor Day Weekend before finally defeating Brad one-on-one the following week. ☐

THUMBS UP

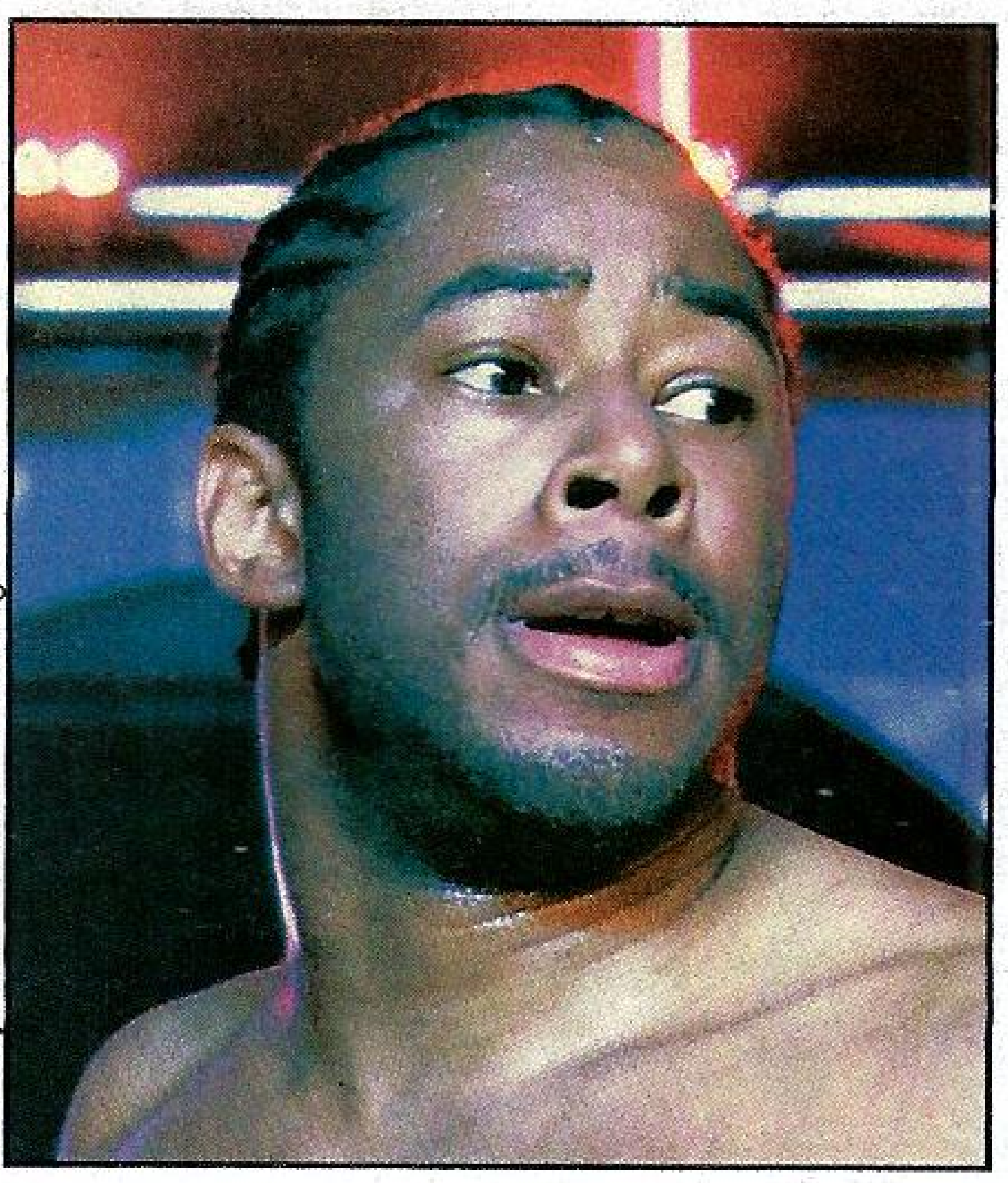


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Thumbs Up to Jay Lethal. It is nice to see a good guy land on his feet. Lethal has done just that by capturing the ROH TV title from El Generico on the company's first TV taping under Sinclair Broadcasting Group. We're still puzzled why TNA would cut Lethal, one of its most popular wrestlers in the ring *and* the lockerroom, after an inspired six-year stint that saw him capture six X division titles, a World X Cup trophy, a TNA World tag title, and, most importantly, the fans' hearts. Instead of being bitter, Lethal got on with his career in ROH by winning this important title. Good for him!

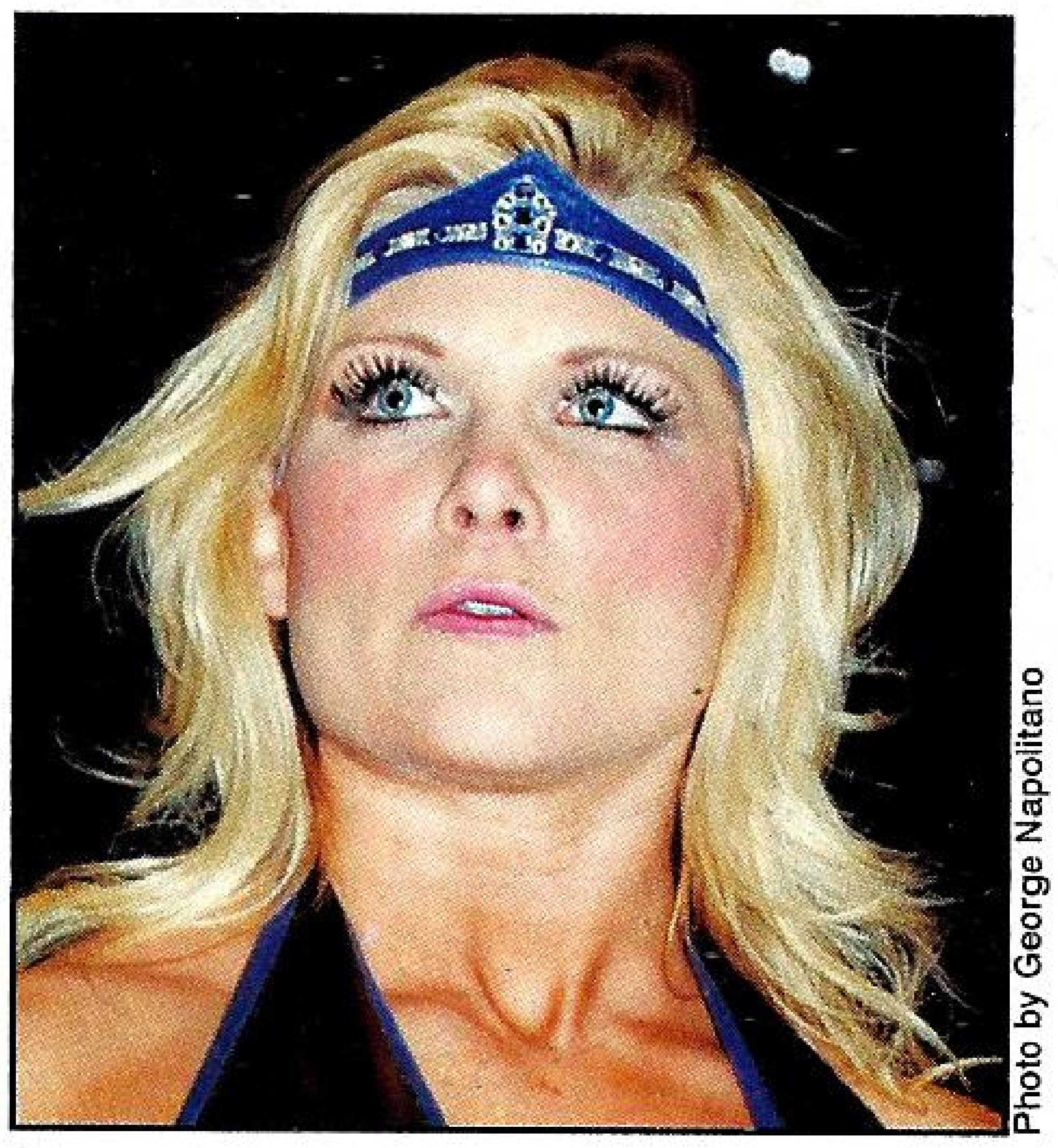


Photo by George Napolitano

Thumbs Up to Beth Phoenix. It might seem odd to give "The Glamazon" any positive acknowledgment after her actions toward Kelly Kelly heading into their Divas title match at SummerSlam. Despite the brutal nature of Phoenix's attacks against Kelly, though, there is some context to her frustration. Once the centerpiece of a strong WWE women's division, Phoenix has been continuously leapfrogged for title opportunities by women with considerably less experience and, in her eyes, less talent. While we cannot condone her actions, we can certainly sympathize with her plight.

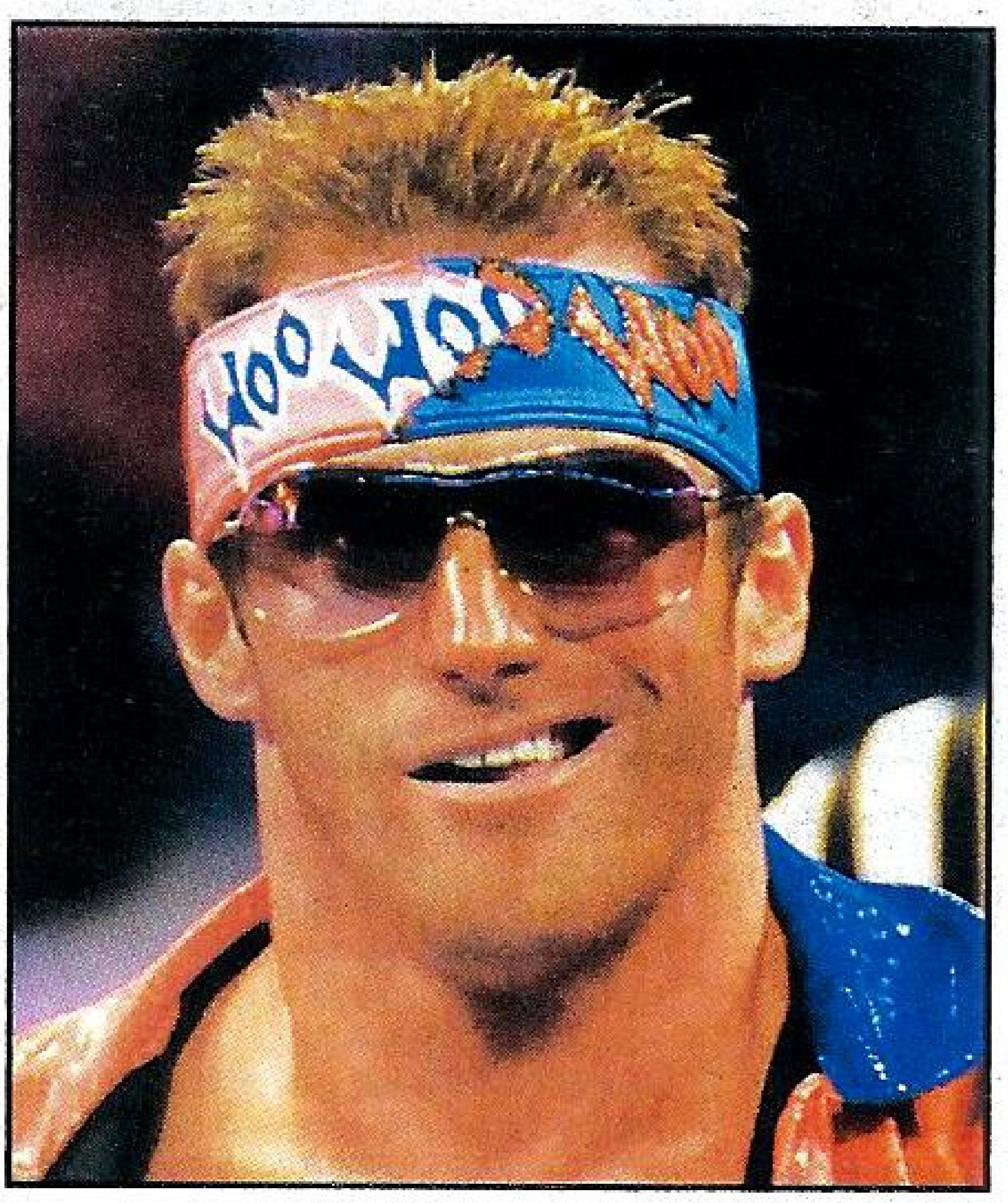


Photo by George Napolitano

Thumbs Up to Zack Ryder. If we were to poll WWE fans online, no doubt Ryder would have earned a "Thumbs Up" months ago for his dedication to posting videocasts that often outdraw popular WWE Internet programs such as *NXT* and *Superstars*. It was not until he resurfaced on *Raw* to monstrous cheers this past June that his motives became so clear. Sometimes, WWE puts wrestlers on the back burner as it searches for ways to help them find their place. But, rather than sulking on various social media, and just waiting for his next match, "Long Island Iced-Z" took the initiative in generating fan interest on his own.

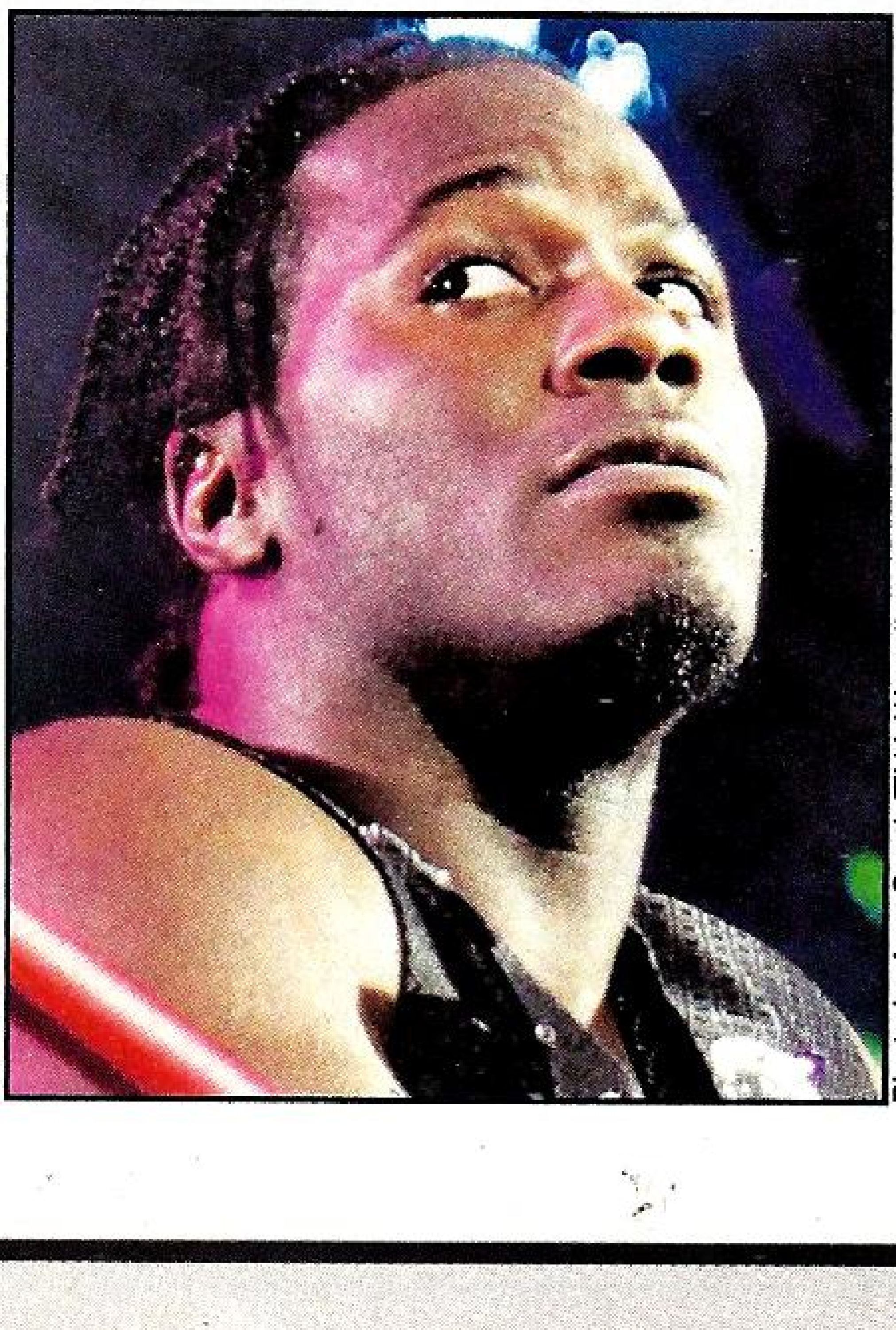
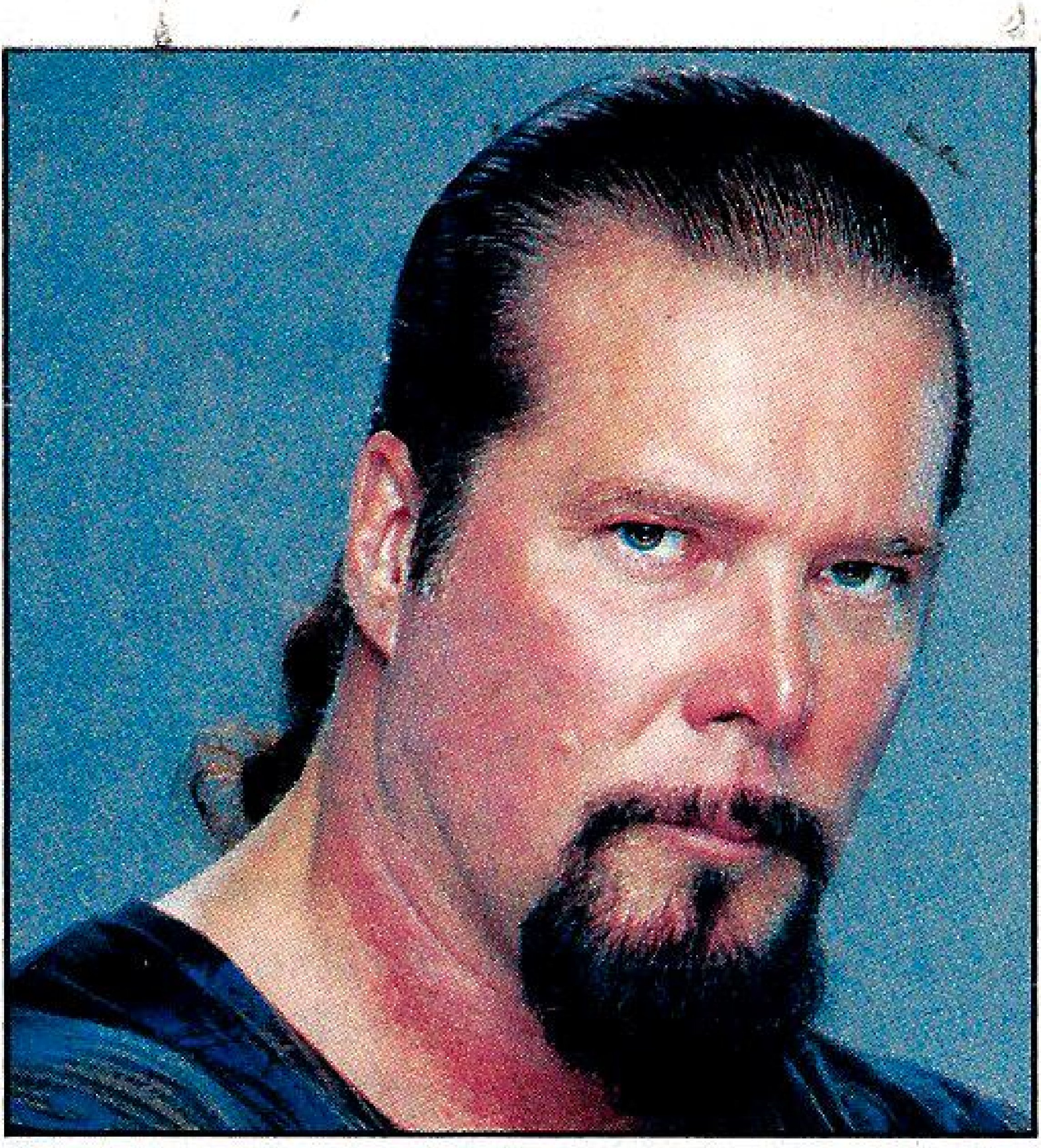


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Thumbs Up to D'Angelo Dinero. The "Pope" took a lot of guff from Brother Devon over this past summer when he became friendly with Devon's wife and sons. To make amends, Dinero graciously allowed Devon to pick up the pinfall win in a Bound For Glory tournament series tag match, which helped Devon collect points toward main-eventing the company's October pay-per-view, despite having not actually accumulated any points himself at the time. Personal feelings aside, Dinero should never have to sacrifice his own in-ring success just to placate a man with whom he wants to be friends. "Pope" almost deserves a "Thumbs Down" for being too nice.

THUMBS DOWN



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Thumbs Down to Kevin Nash. After the reaction he got earlier this year when he made his surprise return to WWE at The Royal Rumble, Nash must have been very frustrated at having to sit on the sidelines without playing a part in WWE's plans. Perhaps it was this frustration that led to his sneak-attack on CM Punk at the end of SummerSlam—an assault that cost Punk his WWE heavyweight title. Nobody has gotten to the bottom of Nash's behavior just yet, but whatever precipitated it is not a valid excuse for his actions.

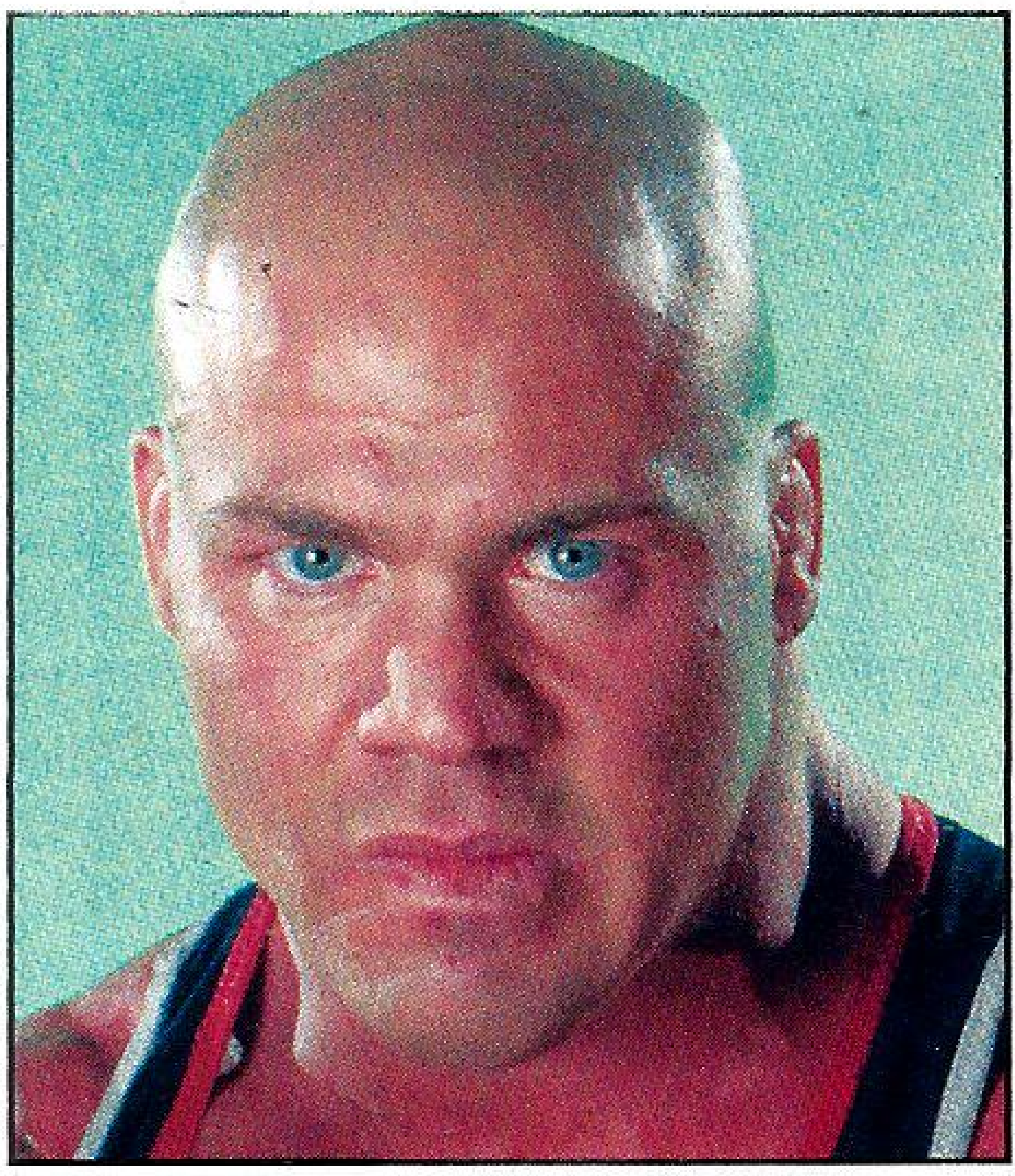


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Thumbs Down to Kurt Angle. Why, Kurt? Why? Regardless of how much time Angle has spent removed from the TNA World title picture, it just makes no sense that he would need to use a steel chair to defeat an older, slower Sting at Hardcore Justice. Was taking Sting's championship so important that Angle needed to use a chair? Why wasn't his wrestling ability enough? Or could it be that Kurt really took it to heart when some fans said he could not beat Sting? We don't know the answers to those questions, but we do know that Angle is great enough to win without cheating.

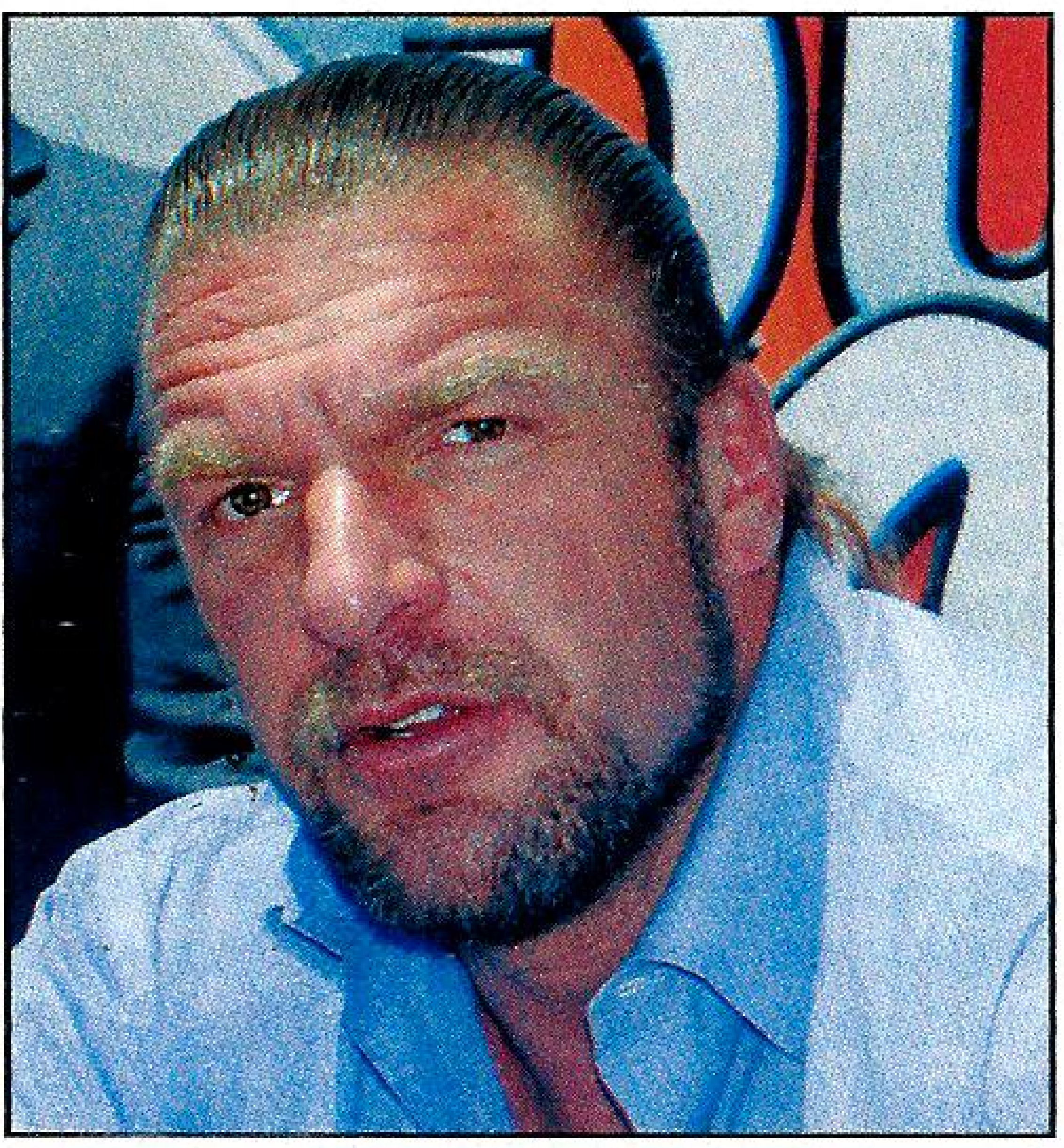


Photo by George Napolitano

Thumbs Down to Triple-H. No, we're not going to nitpick the manner in which he's managed WWE since Vince's ouster. Hey, it's a tough job. But we will call Triple-H on the carpet for his shoddy referee work at SummerSlam. Not seeing Cena's foot on the ropes as Punk pinned him just a few feet away is inexcusable. It's also disturbing to think that while Cena and Punk brought their A-games to the pay-per-view, Triple-H, the COO who inserted himself as special-guest referee, did not.

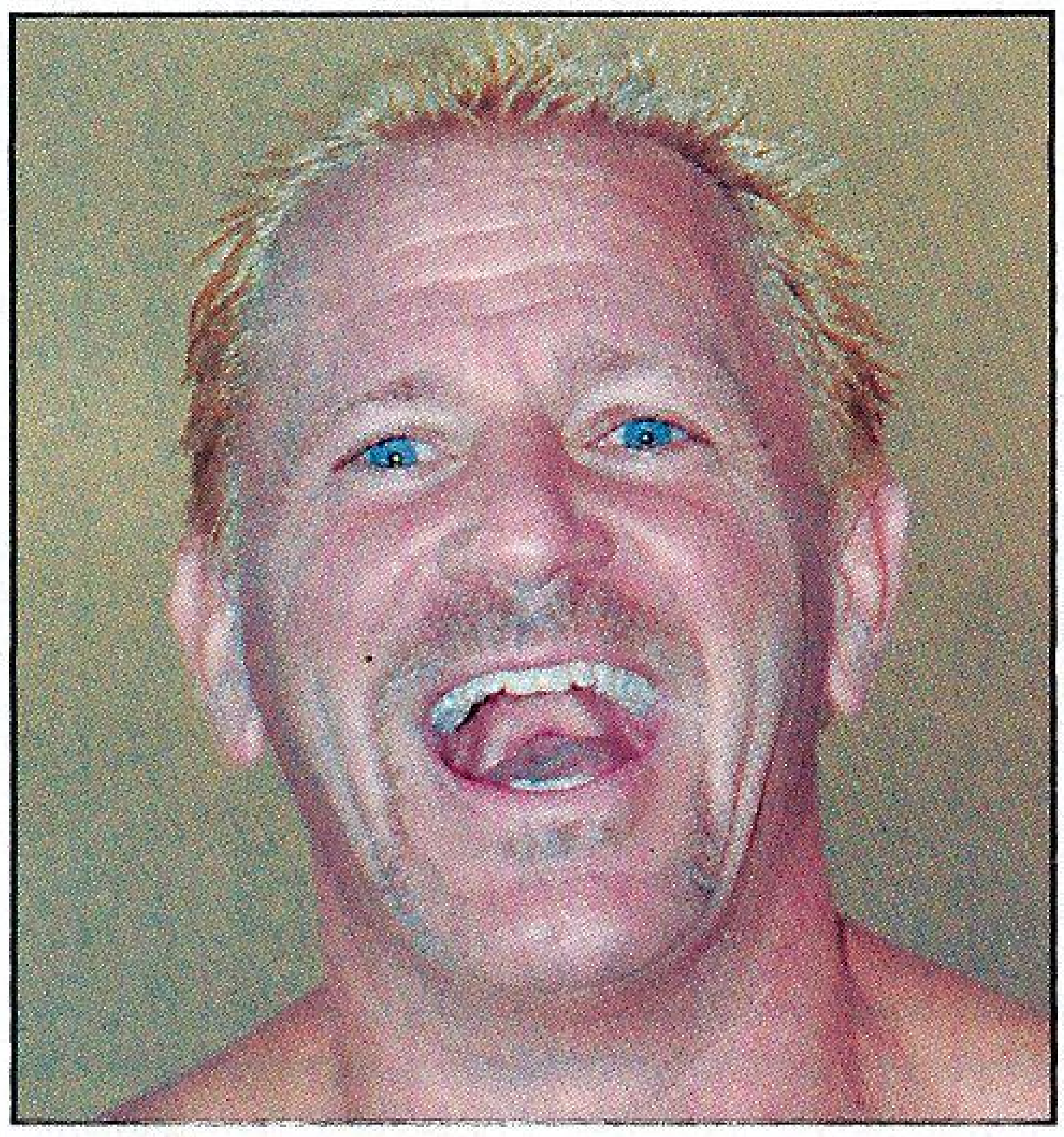


Photo by George Napolitano

Thumbs Down to Jeff Jarrett. Jarrett deserves heaps of praise for traveling to AAA and unseating El Zorro as champion in front of a hostile crowd. But he also deserves heaps of scorn for the blatant disrespect he and his wife, Karen, have shown to the institution of lucha libre, AAA, and Mexican people in general on *Impact Wrestling*. Mocking, then attacking, Mexican custodial workers at Universal Studios serves no purpose, and only obscures Jarrett's fine accomplishments south of the border.

POINT:

THE FANS SHOULD ENCOURAGE SHEAMUS TO STAY GOOD

BY BRADY HICKS

WE CAN ONLY speculate as to what Sheamus was thinking when he rushed to the aid of Smackdown General Manager Theodore Long to save him from a raging Mark Henry. Perhaps the "Celtic Warrior," a relatively recent addition to the blue-brand roster, saw an opportunity to get into Long's good graces. Or, it could have been a matter of seeking revenge against Henry, who dealt him a memorable beatdown when both were on Raw a while back.

There is, of course, another possibility.

Maybe, just maybe, Sheamus saw fit to do the right thing. Maybe this man, who has exhibited a ruthless, almost heartless killer instinct since making his WWE debut two summers ago, well, maybe he isn't purely rotten to the core after all.

Regardless of his motivations, Sheamus did what many other wrestlers had been either unwilling or unable to do when he stood up to Henry. He silenced the big, bad bully (even if temporarily) who had been terrorizing Smackdown for months.

And for that, he deserves not just our praise, but also our support—at least for now.

Photo by George Napolitano

Sheamus showed his true nature when he stood up to Mark Henry, who'd been bullying just about every member of the Smackdown roster. Brady Hicks feels Sheamus would flourish as a fan favorite if given the chance.

The annals of pro wrestling history practically overflow with tales of good guys gone bad, and vice versa. Every instance had its own seminal moment, a proverbial crossroads where a career-defining decision was made. For Sheamus, this may very well be that time.

Sure, he has done some truly dastardly things and taken many a shortcut during the early stages of his career, but he's done nothing that has placed him beyond the point of redemption. If he is to show another side of himself—and confronting Henry may well have been the first step toward that—we as fans owe it to ourselves to meet him halfway.

Though it's only been a very short period of time, Sheamus has so far shown that he can thrive in the good graces of the fans. That's why we should be encouraged to perpetuate the admirable qualities he has displayed during his feud with Henry thus far.

At SummerSlam, Sheamus fell via countout to the "World's Strongest Man." But, he gave Henry one of his stiffest challenges to date. Remember, we're talking about an opponent who absolutely annihilated The Big Show one month earlier at Money in the Bank.

Most impressively, Sheamus did not fall back on any of his old, underhanded tactics to get the job done. That says a lot about his commitment to change, as did the ovation he received from the Staples Center crowd afterward, and his subsequent refusal to make excuses for the loss in a post-match interview.

Just two nights before the pay-per-view, Sheamus appeared on *Conan*. That WWE selected him to promote the company's second biggest PPV of the year is an indication that the WWE higher-ups —whoever they are, these days—also believe that he has turned a corner and can be trusted.

During the interview with O'Brien, Sheamus was laidback and very funny. He took the host's jokes in stride and made a few of his own. To close the segment, he demonstrated his Brogue Kick on a Conan mannequin, knocking its head off to the cheers of the audience.

The favorable reactions have undoubtedly stoked Sheamus in recent months, and seem to be the driving force behind his efforts to clean up his act. If he can stay on this path, it will be only good news for WWE's future.

Brady Hicks is a contributing writer for THE WRESTLER.

COUNTERPOINT:

SHEAMUS IS BAD THROUGH AND THROUGH AND IS NOT WORTHY OF OUR CHEERS

BY DAVE LENKER

THE ONE THING Sheamus doesn't get enough credit for is his smarts.

Just how intelligent is this man? Consider how quickly he rose through the ranks to become a two-time WWE heavyweight champion. He actually used his inexperience to his advantage. Even John Cena was never able to figure him out!

These days, much to my continued astonishment, Sheamus is hearing the cheers of the fans on Smackdown. Now, this certainly didn't begin with the incident in question, when he ran off Mark Henry and saved Teddy Long's hide. Actually, Sheamus has received positive reactions from the fans practically from the moment he debuted on Smackdown. Sometimes, fans just like to cheer guys who kick butt, and the aggressive Dubliner certainly falls under that category.

He was clearly one of the favorites in Smackdown's Money in the Bank match at the PPV of the same name in July. In fact, he received a thunderous ovation when he viciously powerbombed (the also very popular) Sin Cara from the ring apron and through a horizontally positioned ladder. The masked Mexican had to be stretchered out of the arena.

No-rules ladder match or not, was this action justifiable? And, keep in mind, this was prior to Sheamus' run-in with Henry on Smackdown.

The point here is, Sheamus is playing the fans like a Celtic harp!

You can't judge anybody's character on a single, isolated incident. You have to look at the whole picture. We're talking about a guy here with a rap sheet as long as his mean streak. Remember when he brutalized Jamie Noble after arriving on the scene in ECW, ending the cruiserweight's career? How about his unprovoked attack on Jerry Lawler when he came to Raw?

Lest we forget the infamous steel pipe assault on Triple-H, which, for all intents and purposes, may have ended "The Game's" career as a full-time performer, or, how Sheamus would constantly find ways to get himself disqualified in WWE title defenses against Randy Orton to save his championship.

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, Sheamus is one bad dude. And, contrary to the myth that he's some young, impressionable kid, consider also that Sheamus is actually a 33-year-old veteran. Perhaps he hasn't spent a ton of time in WWE just yet, but he's been around a while. Every action he has taken has been well-planned and calculated, including his recent targeting of Henry, which he knew full well was a cheap shortcut into the fans' hearts. And that, not so coincidentally, was his best chance of easing his way back into the main-event scene. Sheamus is no dummy.

At the time he was drafted over from Raw, Sheamus was the U.S. champion. After dropping the title to Kofi Kingston, he immediately tried to inject himself into the feud between Randy Orton and Christian over the World title.

That didn't work, and then he came up short at MITB. So, the next best course of action was to go after Henry, a win over whom would surely catapult him back into title contention.

Sheamus is still looking for that victory. Meanwhile, Henry has now established himself as the number-one contender to Orton's World title.

Sheamus has claimed that his feud with Henry is not over, and he seemingly has the fans' backing. What has he done to prove that he deserves our cheers? Absolutely nothing. In fact, he's about as unworthy as Henry. You seriously have to question the judgment of the WWE Universe these days.

Dave Lenker is a senior writer for THE WRESTLER.

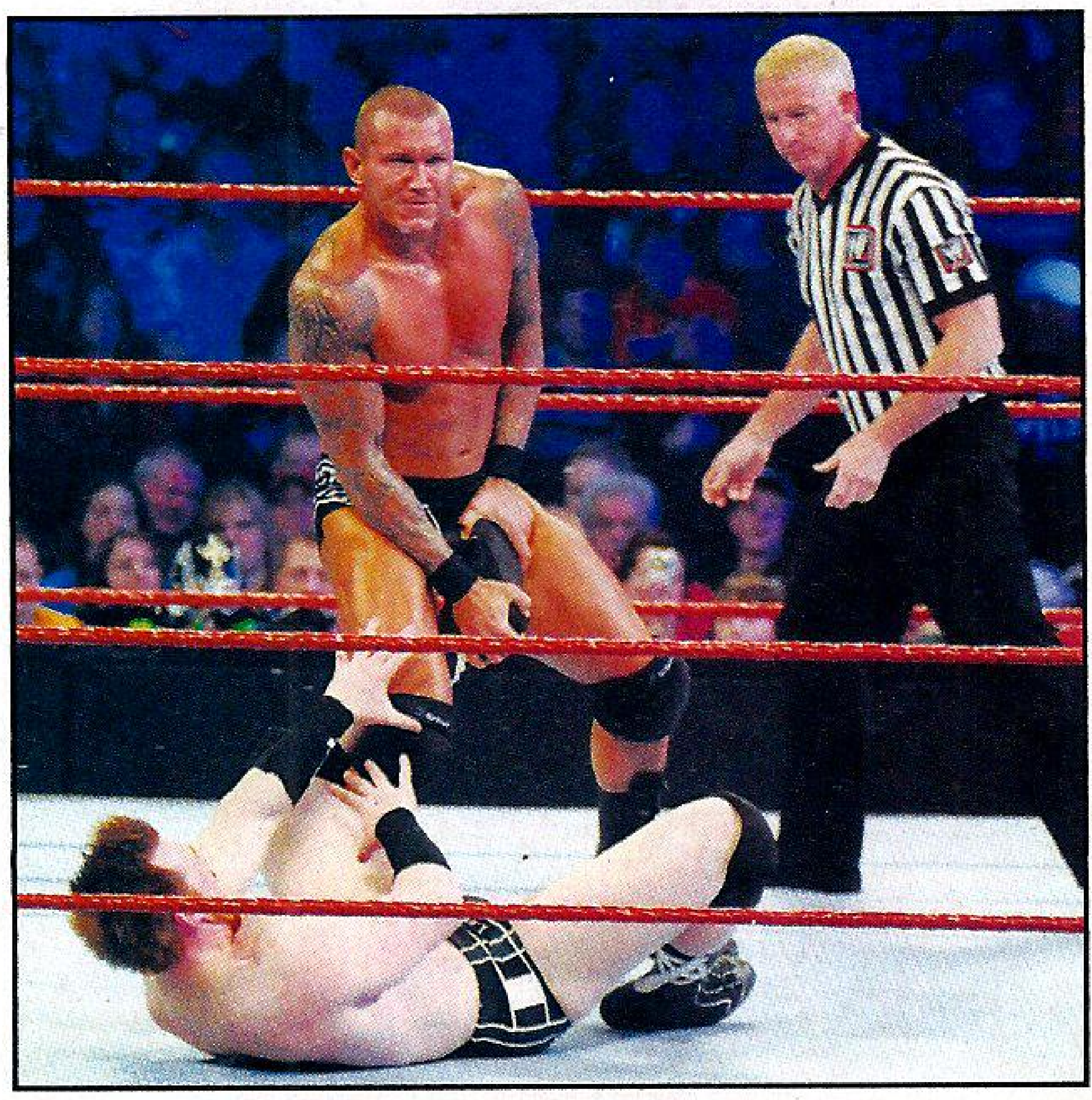


Photo by George Napolitano

Randy Orton held such an advantage over Sheamus that the then-WWE champion often resorted to getting disqualified to keep his title. Dave Lenker feels stunts like that give the full measure of Sheamus, whom Lenker says is inherently rotten.

INTRODUCING

IVELISSE VELEZ

MOST 15-YEAR-OLD girls worry about fitting in, but Ivelisse Velez was never more comfortable than when an arena full of people were jeering her. "I just loved it," she says. "I felt like I would come alive whenever I walked out. It was awesome."

In September 2005, Velez—just six months into her professional wrestling training—made her television debut for Carlos Colon's World Wrestling Council, one of the top two promotions in Puerto Rico.

As the blonde-haired, English-speaking Juliet, she infuriated the proud natives with her pro-America attitude. "It was so funny because when I came out, they kept calling me Trish Stratus. I will never forget that. Inside I'm thinking, *Cool! Look who they're comparing me to!* But, obviously I had to focus on developing my own character."

If the fans thought she looked like Stratus, WWC management must have thought Velez wrestled like Stratus, because they offered the rookie a run with the company almost immediately after her debut match. Some may have been shocked by the teenager's good fortune, but those who understood Velez' fierce dedication and work ethic were not surprised at all.

That's because Velez was a born scrapper. She spent the first five years of her life in Chicago before relocating to Puerto Rico with her mother. Unfortunately, though, economic opportunity was difficult to come by in the Caribbean, so Velez became accustomed to fending for herself.

"Since I was 17, I've been on my own, and it's been a pretty independent kind of lifestyle for me ... working extra hard to get myself anywhere, whether in my wrestling career or just life in general."

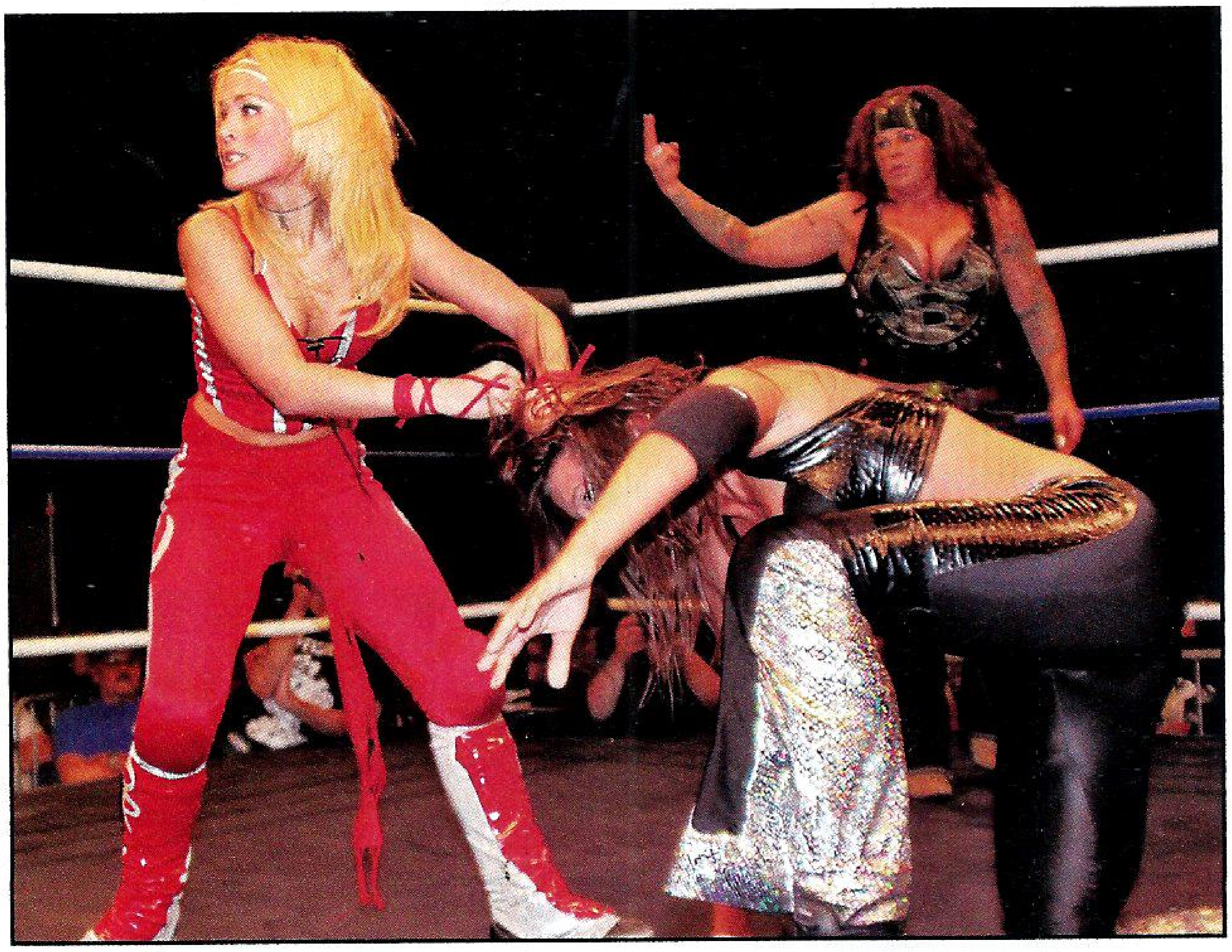
Appropriately, Velez' hard work gave her some options in life, which led to one very tough choice that came during her late-teens: After high school, Ivelisse, an honor student, could accept one of many college scholarship offers or commit full-time to her life's passion—wrestling.

The passion for wrestling was stoked by her older brother David, who exposed his sister to the larger-than-life superstars populating American TV, such as Bret Hart, Goldberg, and Stratus.

While the siblings bonded over wrestling, Ivelisse soon saw it as more than just a cool diversion. "I started looking at it in a different way other than how my brother saw it. And then I just decided, *You know what? I can do this*, and just went for it."

BY STEPHEN SONNEVELD

PHOTOS BY ROB MYERS



Ivelisse Velez (in red) was very close to realizing her dream to be come a contracted WWE wrestler, but an injury derailed her chances of winning *WWE Tough Enough*. POWW's Nikki Anne can attest to the Chicago native's toughness.

After a phone call to a classmate's brother who wrestled on independent shows, Ivelisse hit the canvas running.

A natural athlete who channeled her aggressive nature and love of physicality into every sport she participated in, Velez made it clear to trainer Quique Cruz that she wanted to wrestle, not merely serve as a manager or valet. Nor was she looking for any special treatment due to her gender. Cruz got the message loud and clear and often put Velez through as much or more as his male students.

Once she became grounded in the basics, Velez began soaking up the American, Mexican, and Japanese styles that commingled in the Puerto Rican rings. "Puerto Rico was such a great place for me to learn, because there's a little bit of everything there," she explains. "Plus, the crowds are awesome, too."

Through WWC and Savio Vega's International Wrestling Association, Velez continued her wrestling education, focusing on ring psychology, interacting with crowds, and using camera angles to her advantage. Her dedication to detail quickly earned her a solid reputation with promoters as a dependable hand that could be counted on to always bring her A-game.

In 2009, though, Velez found herself at yet another tough crossroads: stay at home in Puerto Rico or try to take her career to WWE, where Trish, Lita, Victoria, and Jazz inspired her. With an unquenchable desire to become the best female wrestler in the world, Velez made the heart-wrenching decision to move back to Chicago in hopes of getting her name out to WWE. "In Puerto Rico," she said, "I started from scratch, and then I worked my way up until I was in the top two companies. Then I had to do the exact same thing all over again."

The change of climate, though, also afforded Velez new opportunities to develop her skills. She added mixed martial arts to her training regimen, which has shaped her current ring style into a lucha and Japanese strong style hybrid.

Velez also tweaked her character. To stand out, she fused heroines from folklore, myth, and comic books into her Juliet the Huntress modern-day-warrior persona.

While establishing a name for herself on the Chicago indy scene in promotions such as POWW, wrestling women like Melanie Cruise, Taylor Made, and December, Velez would soon have to start all over yet again when she received the opportunity she'd been working for her entire career—to win a WWE contract by outlasting several other hopefuls on the revived *WWE Tough Enough* program.

Looking into the eyes of Steve Austin, Booker T., Bill DeMott, and Trish Stratus should have been enough to overwhelm just about any wrestler, but Ivelisse says she was too excited to be intimidated. "I saw them there and just thought, *Bring it on!*"

Seemingly, Velez' career had come full-circle, from being inspired by, compared to, and then mentored by *PWI's* Diva of the Decade. Stratus encouraged Velez to remain strong and aggressive in the ring, but to also embrace and cultivate her sexy side.

While Ivelisse proved tough enough to work through the program's challenges all while dealing with an injury, the trainers eliminated her from the competition so as not to risk permanent damage.

Today, *Tough Enough* is over, the injury is healed, and Velez is back in Chicago, eager to contribute to the business she loves. "When I saw Trish and Lita make it to the main event for the first time on *Raw*, I thought, *Yes, that's what I want to do*," she says.

And when she wants something badly enough, she has proven that she will find a way to get it. ☐

WORKIN' STIFF

BY AL CASTLE

I'VE DEDICATED A fair amount of ink in this column over the years to criticizing TNA wrestling. And so, fairly or unfairly, I've earned a reputation among some as being anti-TNA.

Nothing could be further from the truth. As is the case with most relationships, disappointment is typically a symptom of affection. To be let down by someone or something, you have to care about it first. When I point out what, I believe, to be wrong with TNA, it is with the hope that those problems will be addressed and corrected, and that TNA will put forth the best product it possibly can. Above all, I try to be fair to anyone I criticize.

However, there is such a thing as being too negative. And, just as a pay-per-view event filled with cage matches tends to lessen the impact of each individual cage match, too much nitpicking could reduce the weight of each valid critique. Positive reinforcement is also important. And TNA deserves credit for everything it does right, and there's plenty.

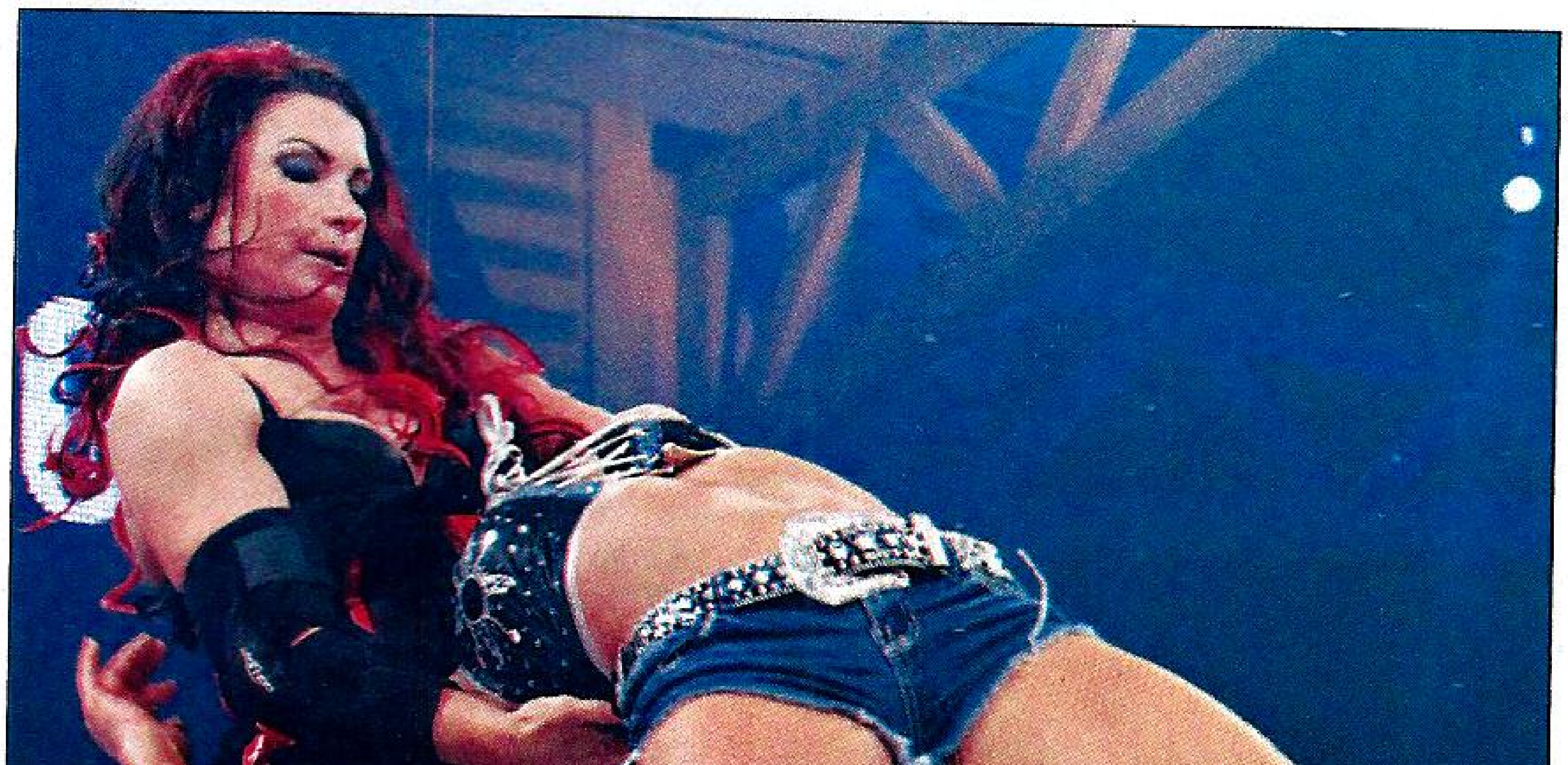


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Tara and Mickie James help make the Knockouts division one of TNA's most valuable assets, along with its X and tag team divisions, says Al Castle.

Here are just a few of the many things there are to admire about TNA (completely sarcasm-free):

TNA employs some of the best wrestlers in the world: From The Motor City Machine Guns to AJ Styles to Samoa Joe, TNA boasts one of the finest rosters in the sport's history. Whether they are high-flyers, brawlers, or ring technicians, TNA has no shortage of wrestlers who can deliver five-star performances. Plus, Kurt Angle is *always* in the discussion as the very best wrestler in the U.S.

TNA takes pride in being a wrestling company: While WWE has taken great pains to erase the term "wrestling" from its vernacular, TNA has embraced the label, even renaming its flagship television show *Impact Wrestling*. Rather than try to indoctrinate performers, announcers, and fans into its new corporate vision by changing their parlance, TNA calls its product by the same name its fans do. And that goes a long way toward building credibility and good will.

TNA makes an effort to keep that fourth wall up: In WWE, it's not unusual for wrestlers to inexplicably devise sinister plots backstage while standing directly in front of a video camera. TNA officials know that for fans to be able to suspend their disbelief, a wrestling product needs to look as real as possible. The roving voyeur-cam it developed on its *Reaction* show makes it plausible for fans to peek in on even the most private of moments, while never questioning how it was caught on tape.

TNA has top-notch production values: If you've ever visited the Impact Zone at Universal Studios, your first reaction might have been, *Wow, this place is tiny*. The fact that the small dimensions of the makeshift arena are not obvious to TV viewers is a testament to TNA's highly skilled production team. From lighting, to pyrotechnics, to giant video screens, to sleek graphics, TNA looks every bit the major league wrestling company.

TNA values tag team and women's wrestling: TNA realizes something that WWE seemingly forgot years ago: When done right, a tag team or women's match can have every bit as much appeal as a men's singles bout. Beer Money Inc. has long been one of TNA's hottest acts, and is regularly positioned high in the cards. And many of TNA's Knockouts are not only lovely, but also talented, and tough as nails. Over the past year, TNA has gone as far as to feature a women's match in the main-event slot of its weekly TV show. When's the last time WWE did that?

TNA has an eye for talent: Over the years, TNA has introduced millions of fans to gifted wrestlers who might otherwise be plying their trade in front of small crowds at independent wrestling shows. In recent months, TNA has picked up such blue chippers as Zema Ion, Tony Neese, and two-time ROH heavyweight champion Austin Aries, who, incidentally, was turned down for a spot on WWE's *Tough Enough* program. WWE's loss has most definitely been TNA's gain.

TNA puts a premium on athleticism and excitement: TNA's X division has seen some peaks and valleys over the years, but it remains the premiere stage for high-flying, cruiserweight style wrestling in the U.S. Undersized wrestlers who may never get a look by WWE because of their dimensions are given the chance to shine in TNA, and compete for a prestigious title held by the likes of Jerry Lynn, AJ Styles, and even Kurt Angle.

TNA doesn't mind getting edgy: WWE's PG approach may suit its investors and sponsors just fine, but it's left some fans who like a little raunch in their wrestling out in the cold. TNA is not afraid to spice up its product with mature language and adult themes. And if a steel cage match between two bitter enemies results in some bloodshed, TNA trusts that you (and your children) will be able to handle it just fine.

TNA tries to do right by its fans: If you've ever attended a TNA live event in person, you know that the company bends over backward to try to send its fans home happy. Wrestlers go out of their way to shake hands and sign autographs. A few lucky fans are even brought backstage during the event. The accessibility of TNA stars is a throwback to the more intimate days of regional wrestling, and it's a welcome departure from what many fans expect from a live, major league wrestling show.

TNA respects the legends of the sport: Whether their best days are behind them or not, it's indisputable that wrestling greats like Sting, Hulk Hogan, and Ric Flair still have a lot to offer in 2011. TNA has tried to find new ways to keep the stars of yesteryear relevant today. Not only can fans benefit from that approach, but so can young wrestlers who get to share a lockerroom and a ring with some of wrestling's most accomplished pioneers. ☐

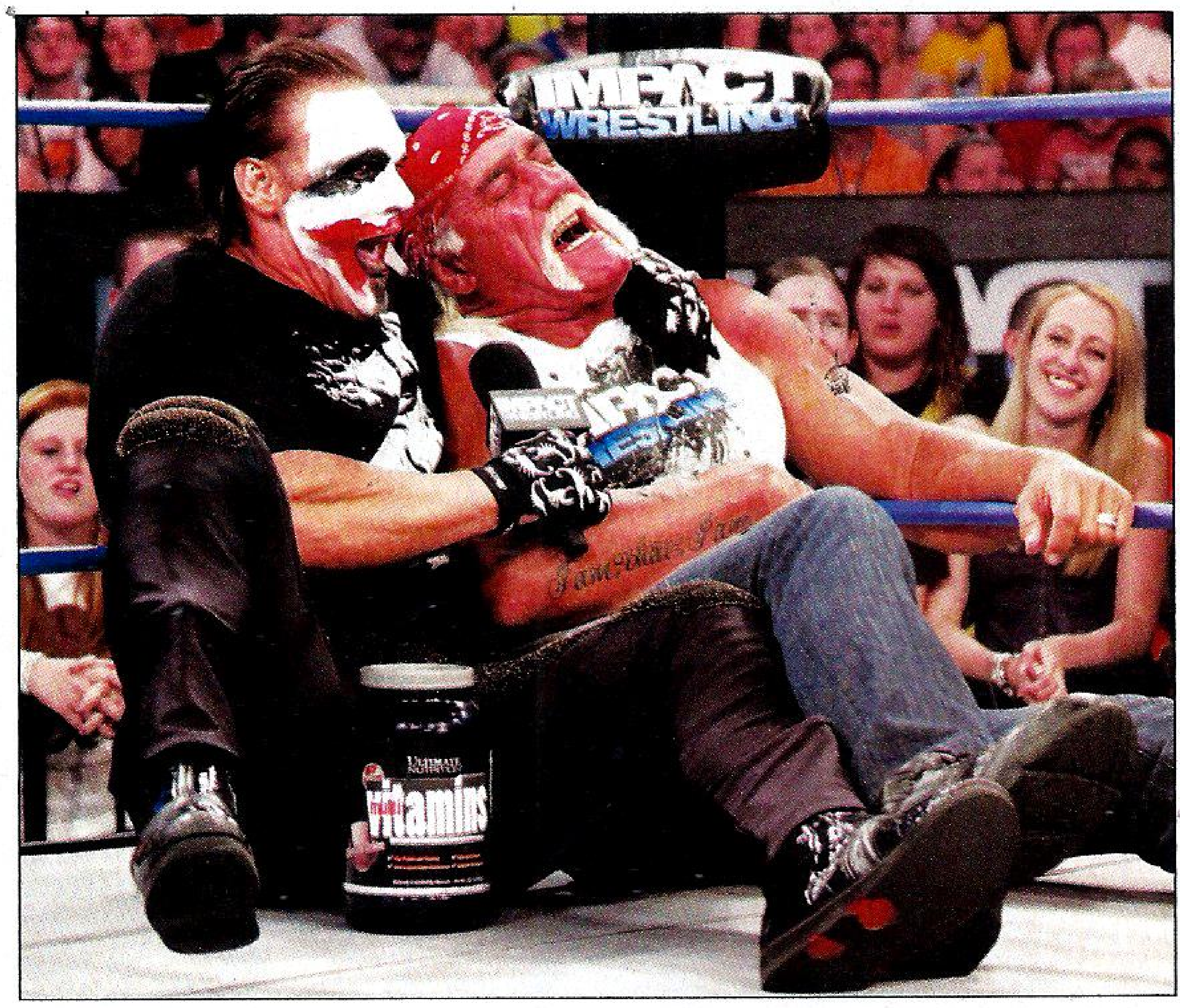


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Both Sting and Hulk Hogan may be close to the end of their careers, but Castle feels TNA does an excellent job of getting the most from their contributions.

Q & A

TULLY BLANCHARD

"You were supposed to hate me–that was my goal"

HIS CAREER WILL be forever linked with the legendary exploits of The Four Horsemen in the mid-1980s. Whereas fellow members Ric Flair and Arn Anderson will also be identified with less-stellar versions of wrestling's first faction, Tully Blanchard represents a specific era of the Horsemen, when the group was at its SuperStation TBS zenith.

But there was much more to Blanchard's career than his three-year-plus run with the Horsemen. The son of "Joltin'" Joe Blanchard, he started out selling programs and working the concession stands at an early age, and he became a football standout at West Texas State University alongside Merced Solis (Tito Santana) and Ted DiBiase. He learned the wrestling trade in Florida and the Mid-Atlantic before returning to Texas and helping his father run Southwest Championship Wrestling, which earned a contract with USA Network in the fledgling days of cable television. During this time, Blanchard joined forces with Gino Hernandez to form The Dynamic Duo, but Blanchard turned on Hernandez the very night they won the Southwest tag team title.

The second-generation star joined Jim Crockett Promotions in late-1984, where he won the NWA TV title and had a brief rivalry with Rick Steamboat before adopting the lovely Baby Doll as his "Perfect 10" valet. This led to an epic feud with Dusty Rhodes, who won Baby Doll's services for 30 days after defeating Blanchard in a steel cage at the 1985 Great American Bash. A few months later, Blanchard beat Magnum T.A. for the U.S. title and that war heated up the summer of '85.

Blanchard's loose alliance with NWA World champion Ric Flair and National tag team champions Ole and Arn Anderson led to the formation of The Four Horsemen. There were more chapters of his feud with Rhodes to come, with Blanchard beating the "American Dream" for both the National and TV titles. His taped-fist matches with "Hands Of Stone" Ron Garvin were a highlight of the 1986 Great American Bash series.

Increasing tensions with Jim Crockett Promotions prompted Blanchard and Arn Anderson, who had reigned as dominant NWA World tag team champions, to defect to the WWF in 1988. Managed by Bobby Heenan, The Brainbusters ended Demolition's year-plus WWF World tag team title reign in 1989. While in the WWF, Blanchard and Anderson engaged in a scintillating series of matches against The Rockers. In a rather notorious episode in wrestling history, the WWF suddenly ordered a drug test when it became known that Blanchard was headed to WCW. Blanchard failed a drug test and WCW backed out of the deal. On bad terms with both major companies, Blanchard searched for a new direction in his life and found it through his new ministry.

"This was far from the cocky Tully Blanchard that fans may remember from the 1980s," reported Senior Writer Harry Burkett, who spoke to the former Horseman for over 90 minutes. "Today, at his core, Blanchard is a very humble person who seems to have a healthy perspective on life."

Q: As we sit here for this interview, it's amazing to think that it's been over 20 years since you've wrestled full-time for one of the major promotions.

A: That's right. It's been since November 1989.

Q: Just as remarkable, you packed a mighty big career into a relatively short amount of time—only about 13 years. Despite the fact that you've been gone from the scene for quite a while, longtime fans remember you with very vivid memories. Do you know why that is?

A: I'm not really sure. I'm a bit amazed by that. The whole nature of the wrestling business changed through the mid- to late-'80s, when cable television became popular through the SuperStation in Atlanta and on the USA Network. I happened to be involved in the Horsemen and had great matches with Dusty, and Arn and I had great matches with The Rock 'n' Roll Express and others. I was fortunate to be in a good place with a lot of talent. Watching me get beat up somehow was memorable for people.

Q: I felt cheated that I was deprived of watching Tully Blanchard perform well into the '90s. I understand the ministry became a greater passion for you than wrestling. How did that come about?

A: I was a person who was not at rest. I was always looking for another solution to fix my life. I left The Four Horsemen, which was as strong as anything has ever been in professional wrestling. Arn and I went to WWE at the end of 1988, trying to fix the chaos that I was living personally. Even though Arn and I had great success in WWE, the things I was looking for didn't happen. I negotiated a deal with WCW for Arn and myself, and they were supposed to pay us three-quarters of a million dollars over three years.

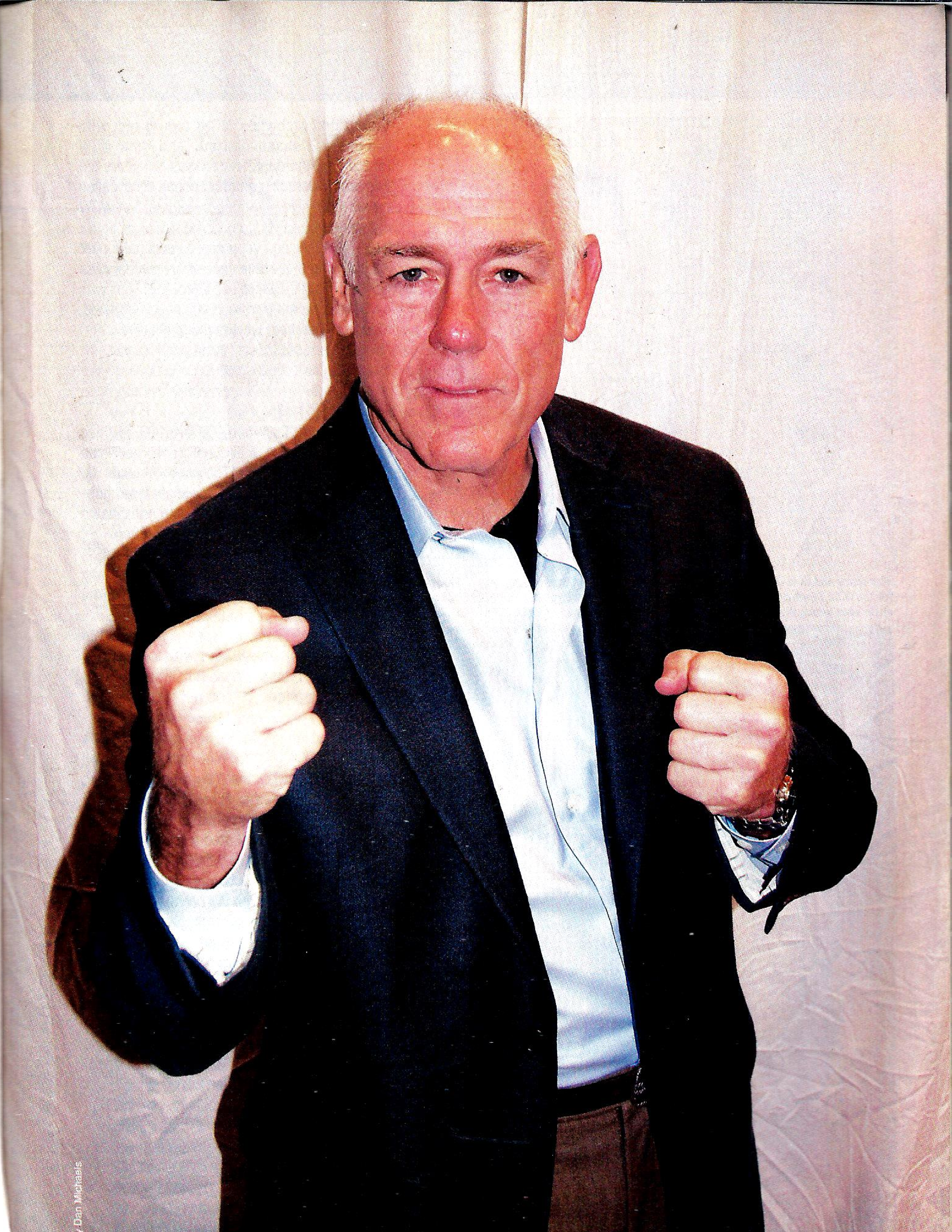
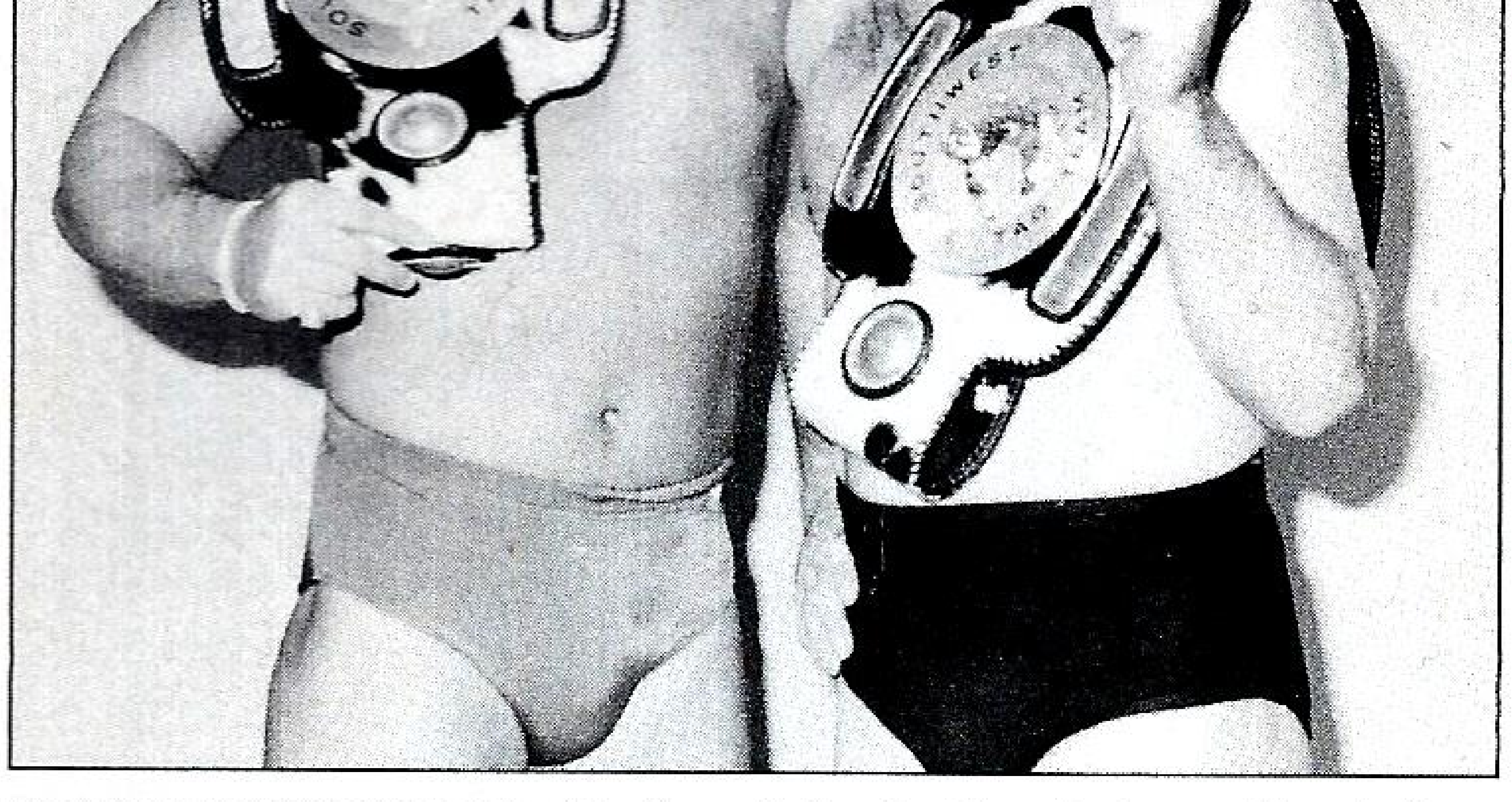
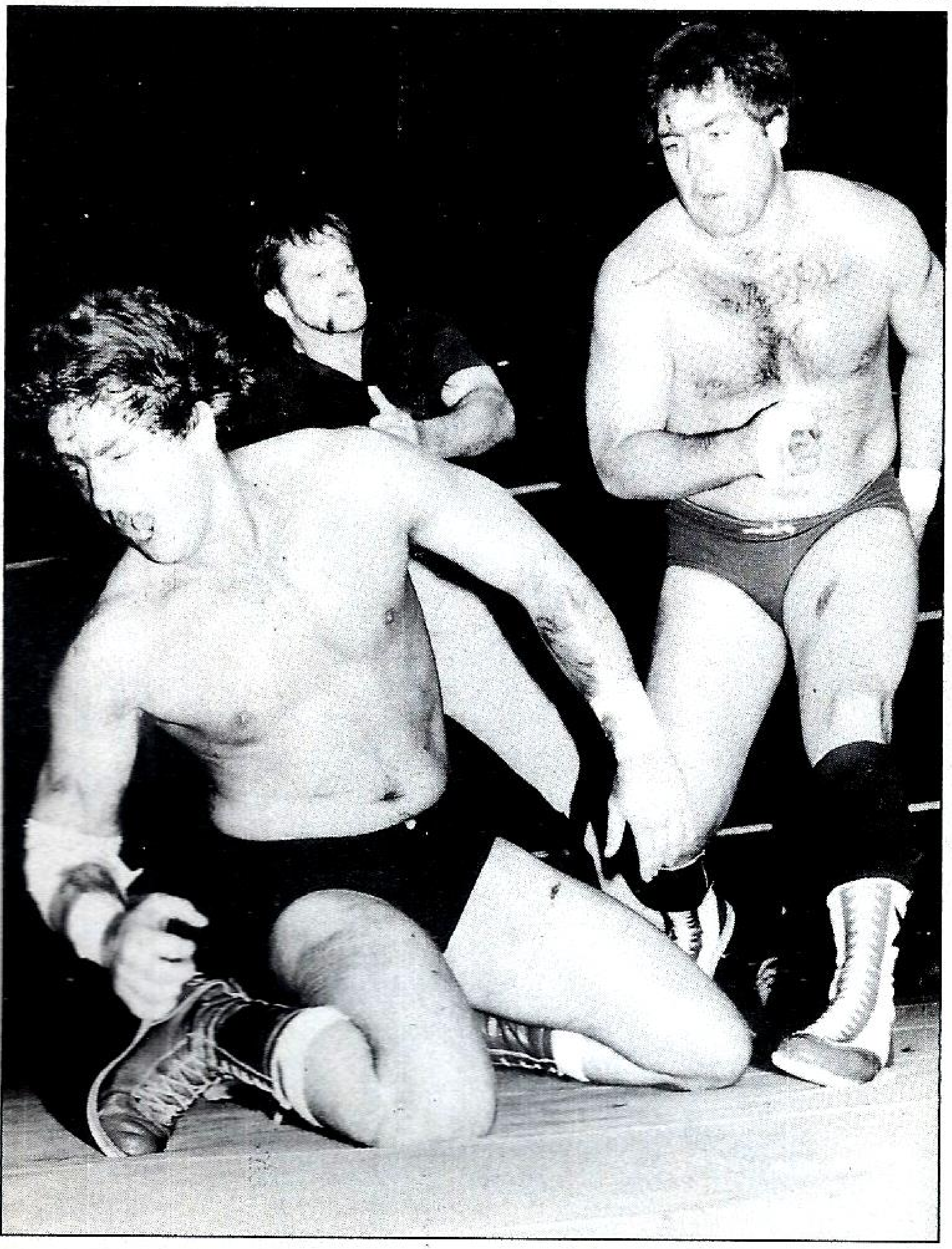


Photo by Dan Michaels



Blanchard and Gino Hernandez, The Dynamic Duo, beat Len Denton and Tony Anthony for the SCW Southwest tag team belts in March 1983. Shortly after this lockerroom photo was taken, Blanchard attacked Hernandez, touching off a violent feud (below).



During that process, I failed a drug test with WWE, Vince suspended me, and then WCW reneged on the deal. There I was, 35 years old and out of wrestling all of a sudden. Flair called me at 1:00 in the morning to tell me that WCW had reneged on its commitment. Three hours later, I simply said five words: "Jesus, take over my life." And that's when one of my favorite cuss words changed everything about me. That was 4:03 in the morning on November 13, 1989. And, 22 years later, here we sit talking about it.

Q: As you know, a lot of wrestlers have taken a similar path since that time, but you were one of the first to make your conversion public, weren't you?

A: I don't know of anybody before me. DiBiase became born again in '91, and there was Nikita Koloff in about '95. Jake "The Snake" Roberts did it for a while, but I don't even know what happened there. Then there was Sting and Shawn Michaels. I'm sure there have been others, but those are ones off the top of my head. But, in 1989, it was pretty much new to the wrestling business for a person to turn to the Lord in a prominent way.

Q: I find it very interesting that you dedicated your ministry to spreading the Gospel among inmates. I suppose Chuck Colson made that famous. Was there anyone in particular who inspired you to go in that direction?

A: I had the opportunity to speak in prisons. I met a guy named Jack Murphy, more popularly known as Murph the Surf in the '60s, who had been a jewel thief, among other things. He worked for a former Cleveland Brown named Bill Glass, an All-Pro defensive end. Bill started going to prisons in 1972 after traveling with Billy Graham. It was a very, very awesome experience for me to be able to go into prisons all over the country and tell my story to inmates, and, more importantly, teach people how to share their faith. I might not have changed my life if someone hadn't shared their faith with me, because I didn't go to a church until I was 35 years old. To be more accurate, I went to church with the football team while I was in college, but that's about it.

Q: So a lot of inmates had to have known you from your wrestling career.

A: Huge amounts.

Q: You were best known as a heel. This is a weird question, but did that give you more credibility among the inmates? It's not like you were Bruce Jenner coming off the track like an all-American hero.

A: *(Laughs)* I think, after a while, the fact that you

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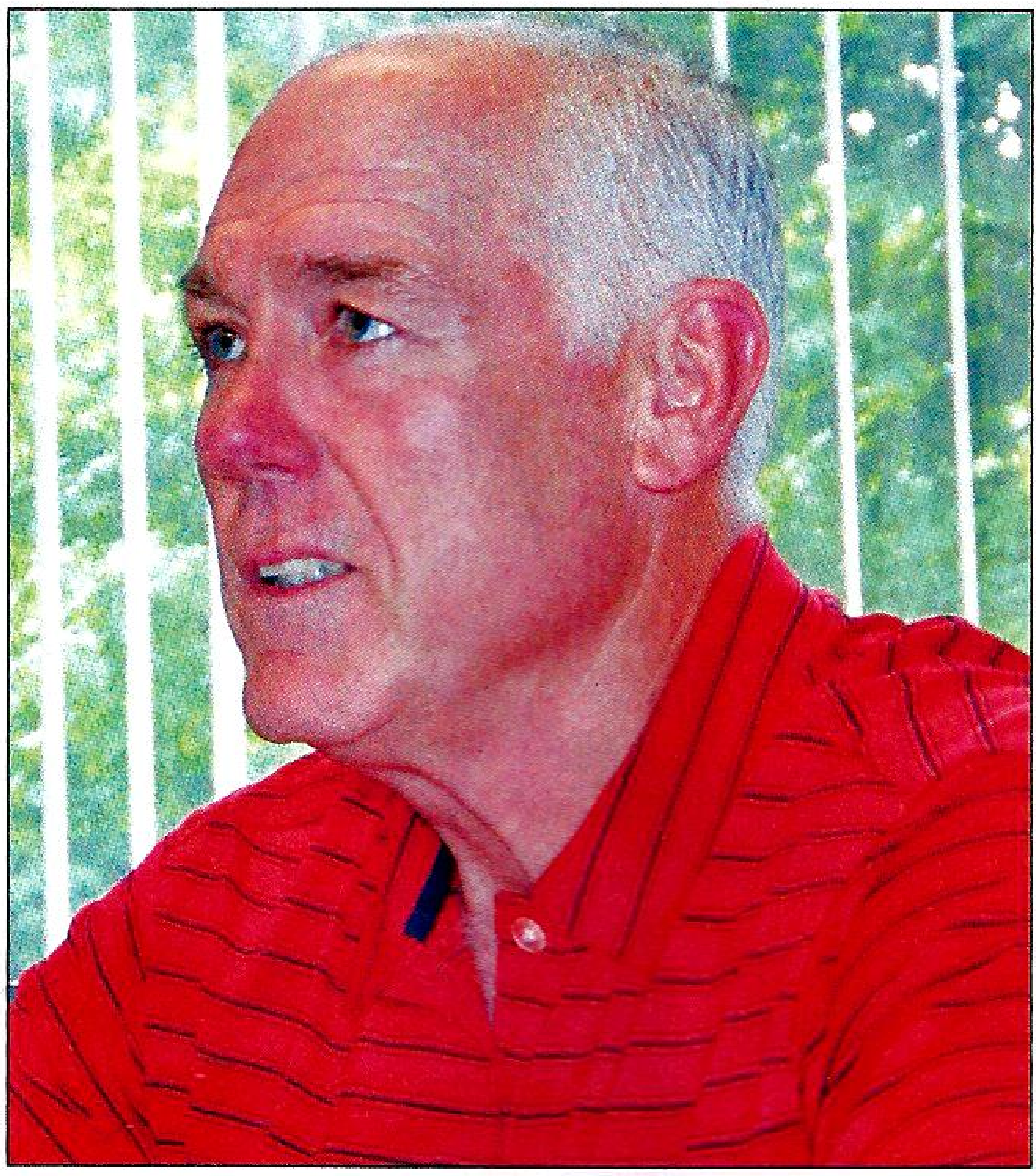

Interview Photos by Donnie Haulk

were a heel or babyface is gone, and the simple fact they remember you is enough. It has helped that everyone remembers The Four Horsemen, and all those legendary matches with Dusty Rhodes and The Road Warriors, for example, are on the Internet for people to see. A lot of people have told me, "God, I loved to hate you." I say, "You were supposed to hate me—that was my goal."

Q: Have you had the opportunity to have many interesting conversations with J.J. Dillon over the years, considering he has worked for prison systems in a professional capacity?

A: We did the prisons in Delaware, but J.J. wasn't working there yet. He and I haven't been able to really sit down and talk about it. When we're together at events, people are usually coming by for you to sign autographs. We never get to sit down at dinner and just chit-chat, although we probably talk on the phone about every two or three months, with updates on the kids and stuff. J.J. and I used to spend a lot of time together, more time than I ever spent with Ric and Arn.

Q: Leaving wrestling had to be difficult because it had been your life. Of course, your father is Joe Blanchard, and I read that you got involved in the business at an early age, selling programs and working the concession stands. Is that true?

A: *(Laughs)* That's true. When I was in the fifth grade, I sold peanuts at the arena in San Antonio, and then I got where I could sell popcorn. If you could sell peanuts, you could sell popcorn!

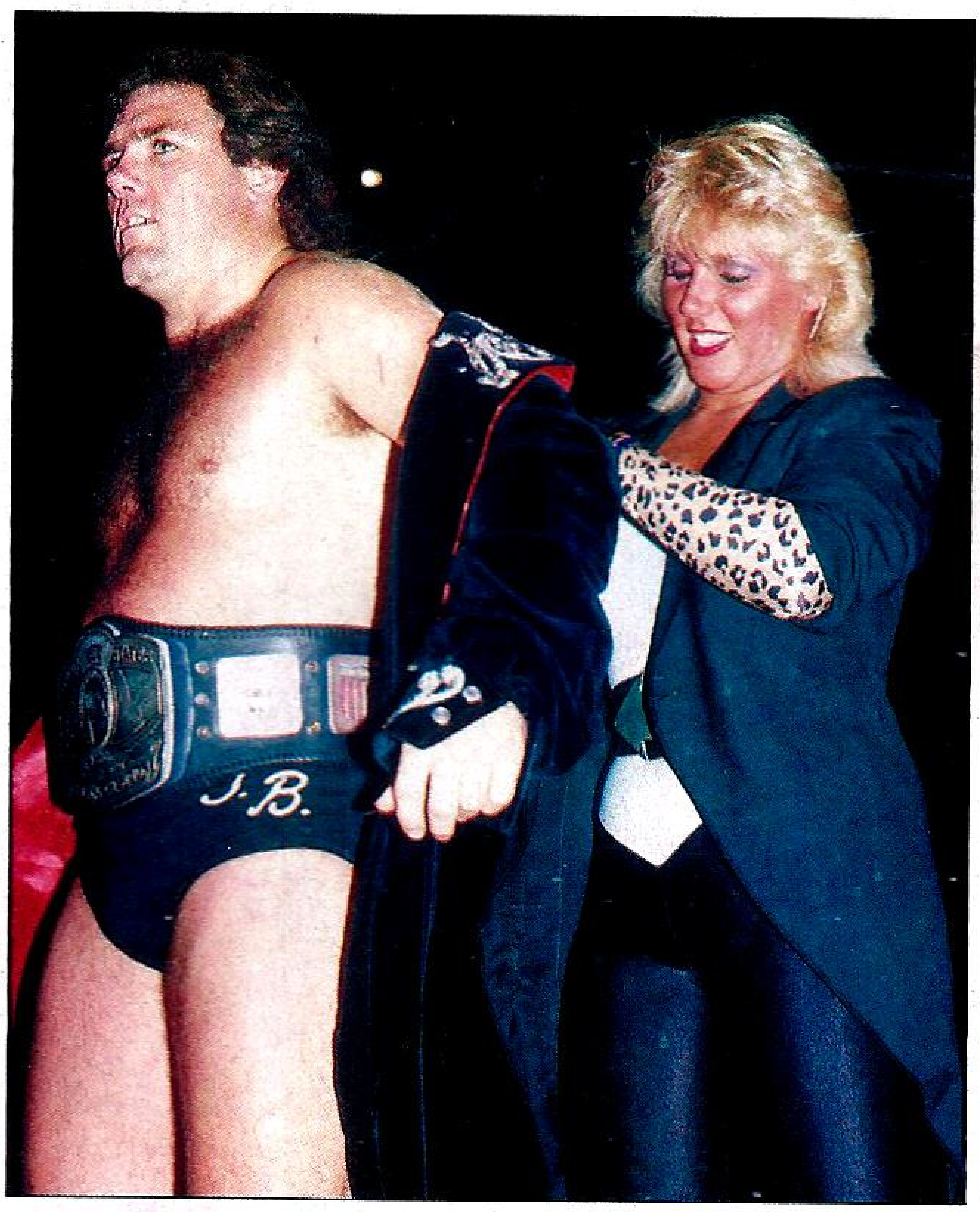
Q: You got to move up!

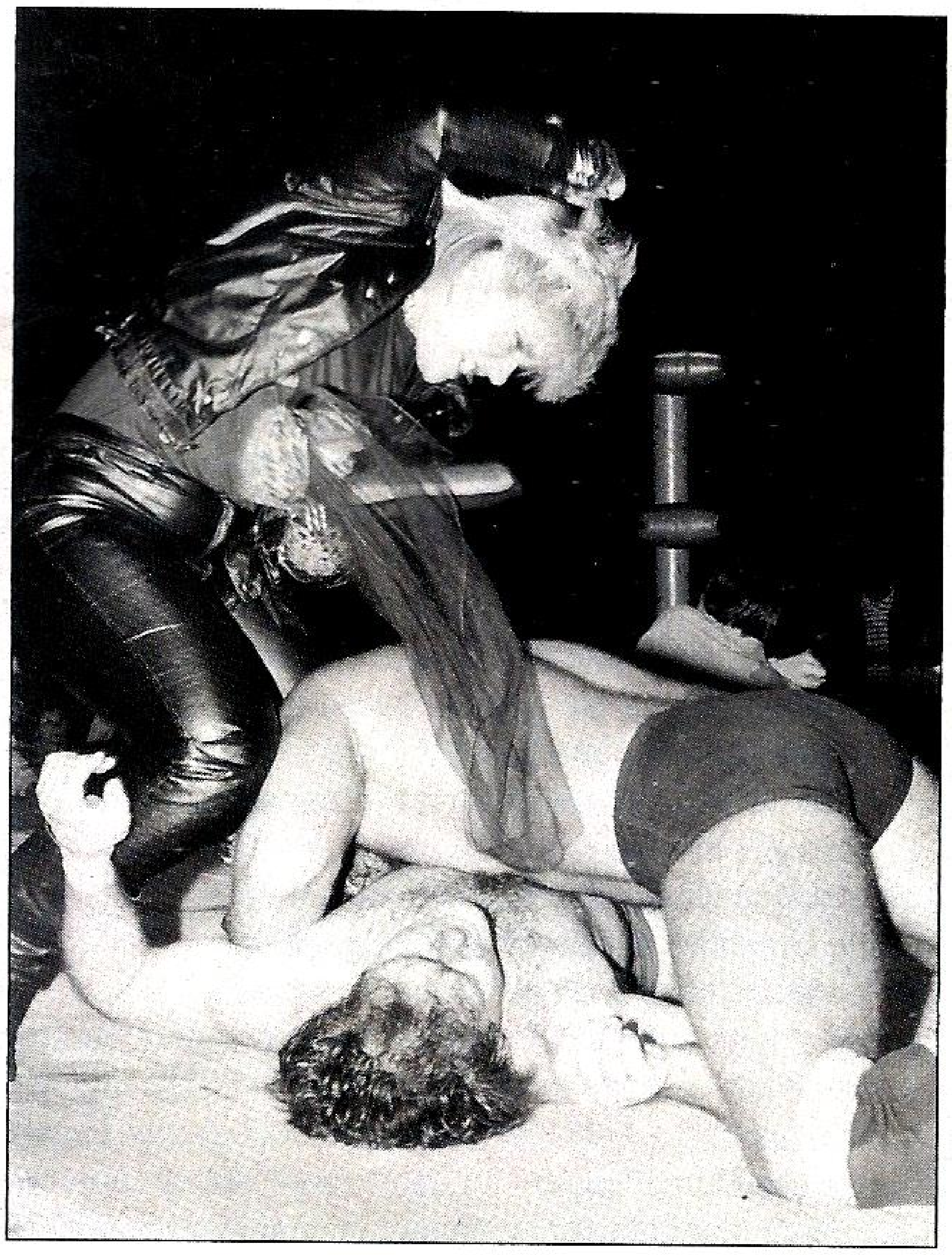
A: Yes, popcorn was much easier to sell than peanuts. Then when I got a little bigger, I could carry the two tin pails with glass soda pop bottles in them. You could sell soda water for maybe 25 cents. We'd get exhausted toting that stuff around. The next day after the matches, I helped sweep the arena. I set the ring up, too. I drove around the parking lot at the mall, putting flyers on all the windshields for the big shows. While in college, I refereed for about three years. I announced a little bit for the TV show. There is not much in the wrestling business I haven't done. Not a lot of guys get to have all those stories.

Q: Talk about paying your dues from the beginning. When you were a young kid, besides your dad, who did you look up to? Who did you want to be like?

A: Johnny Unitas! I wanted to play football, and my dad wanted me to play football. And he didn't want me to be a lineman like he was. He wanted me to play quarterback, so he taught me how to play quarterback.

Blanchard revealed in this interview that he wasn't even aware that Baby Doll served as Hernandez' valet prior to him discovering her as his "Perfect 10" and serving Tully in a similar manner.





The ever-present Nickla "Baby Doll" Roberts was responsible for Tully's robe (above) and his health (right).

Q: When did you figure out you were pretty good at football?

A: I could throw pretty well. When my dad moved us to Texas, football was king there, so I was fortunate enough to start at quarterback in my sophomore year in high school. I started for three years and we had a pretty good team, so I got a scholarship. Somewhere in there, I figured out I was decent.

Q: One factoid that has always stuck in my mind is that you had some sort of offensive record at West Texas in which you placed second only to Mercury Morris. Do you know what record I'm talking about?

A: I'm not completely sure. I was very high in the number of offensive plays. We ran the wishbone for the three years I started at quarterback. It wasn't unusual for us to have 60 or 70 offensive plays or even higher in some games. We had a very good running attack. And I played most of the games because they were trying to save one of the other guys for another year of eligibility. If he didn't have enough playing time, they could petition the NCAA and he could play the year after I left. So that's why I had so many offensive plays to my credit.

Q: Well, just to be mentioned in the same breath as Mercury Morris, that's pretty substantial.

A: Let's just say we went to the same school *(laughs)*. Duane Thomas was also there, and he became a running back for the Cowboys. Bill Robinson, a fullback on our football team, played for the Falcons for a number of years. John Ayres, who played 11 years with the 49ers, was my roommate.

Q: The former UWF commissioner!

A: Yeah, and, of course, no other school in history produced more wrestlers than West Texas, because of the Funks.

Q: Sure. I assume the Funks and Stan Hansen had already passed through by the time you got there. I suppose Ted DiBiase and Tito Santana were your contemporaries there.

A: Merced, who was tight end, was a year older than me. DiBiase was there. Dusty Rhodes, Dick Murdoch, Bruiser Brody, Stan Hansen, and the Funks had already been there. Manny Fernandez played after me.

Q: The only thing more legendary in wrestling lore than the Horsemen is probably that whole West Texas connection. At that point, did you have your mind set on a pro football career, or was wrestling foremost on your mind?

A: I was in a very serious car accident. I don't know if you've ever noticed on videos, but I have a large scar under my right arm. That car wreck happened while I was transferring from SMU to West Texas. That injury really hindered my throwing ability, although I went on to start for three years at West Texas. I tried to recuperate and do the best I could, but I pretty much knew pro football wasn't an option for me. Plus, not many pro teams were looking for wishbone quarterbacks that were 5'11" and 200 pounds and not real fast.

I knew I'd be in the wrestling business, and that's why I studied radio and television in college. So I set out to learn all about wrestling promotion. I went to Florida for

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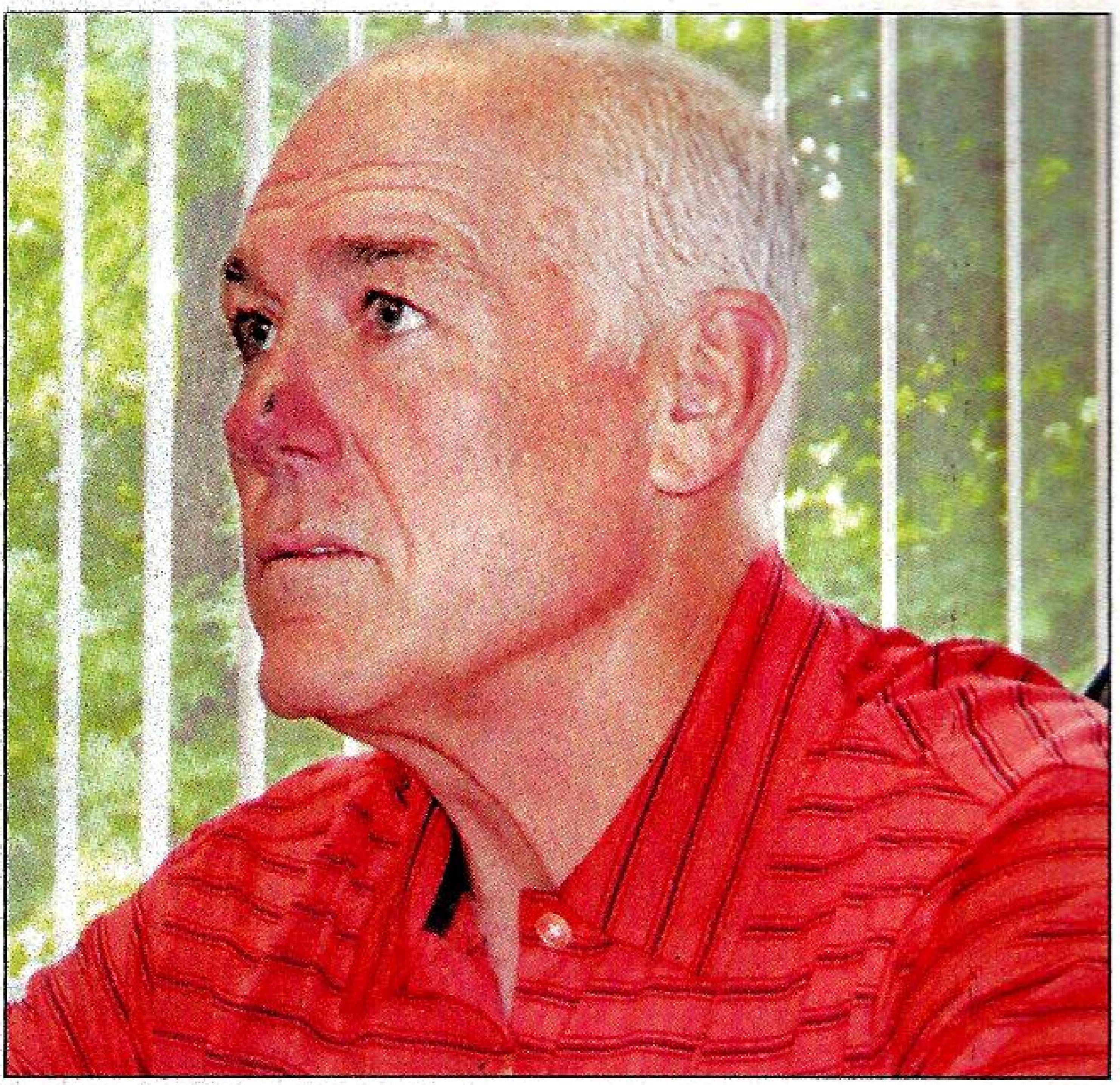

about four or five months after I got out of college. Tito Santana went down with me and we trained together. Eddie Graham had an interest in me, and every morning he came down and worked with me and Merced in the gym, which was located in the same facility as his office and the TV show. Eventually, Merced got his break through Jim Barnett in Atlanta. Eddie Graham was a great ring tactician and psychologist in this business. He poured knowledge into me, and I learned how to be the best I could be in the ring. Four or five months later, when it got to the point where I didn't like getting beat up every night and on TV, I called Wahoo [McDaniel] up in North Carolina, and he got me a job with the Crocketts, where I worked for about eight months. I was just in the first, second, or third match of the shows, a young, moderately handsome babyface type guy. But I was one of 20 guys and there was nothing to make me stand out. I was just a good athlete who was learning how to perform a little bit.

Q: Did you cross paths with Ric Flair at that time?

A: Flair was just starting to become one of the big stars at that time. There was also Wahoo and Blackjack Mulligan, whom my dad helped break into the business. But I didn't want to continue working underneath and getting beat up because I wanted to be able to come back to North Carolina and have the opportunity to be one of the stars. It was the most remarkable place I'd been in so far.

So I left with the knowledge that I'd learned from the Crocketts and Grahams, and took it to our promotion in Texas, Southwest Championship Wrestling. Through the course of working, I realized that I was not a big deal as a babyface, so we switched me heel against Wahoo, and our business changed. I was a great heel and a very mediocre babyface, so it was not rocket science to figure out what we needed to be doing. It was a bit unique because usually the promoter's kid was a babyface, not a heel, because the dad tended to be a babyface promoter.

Q: That was very much the case. What kind of influence did your father have on you? Did you get to see him much as a kid?

PHILLY'S BEST ROCK & ROLL

Blanchard and Baby Doll enjoyed a close relationship, which left this Philadelphia disc jockey all choked up (above). The two had a reunion of sorts at the NWA Legends Fanfest this past August (below).

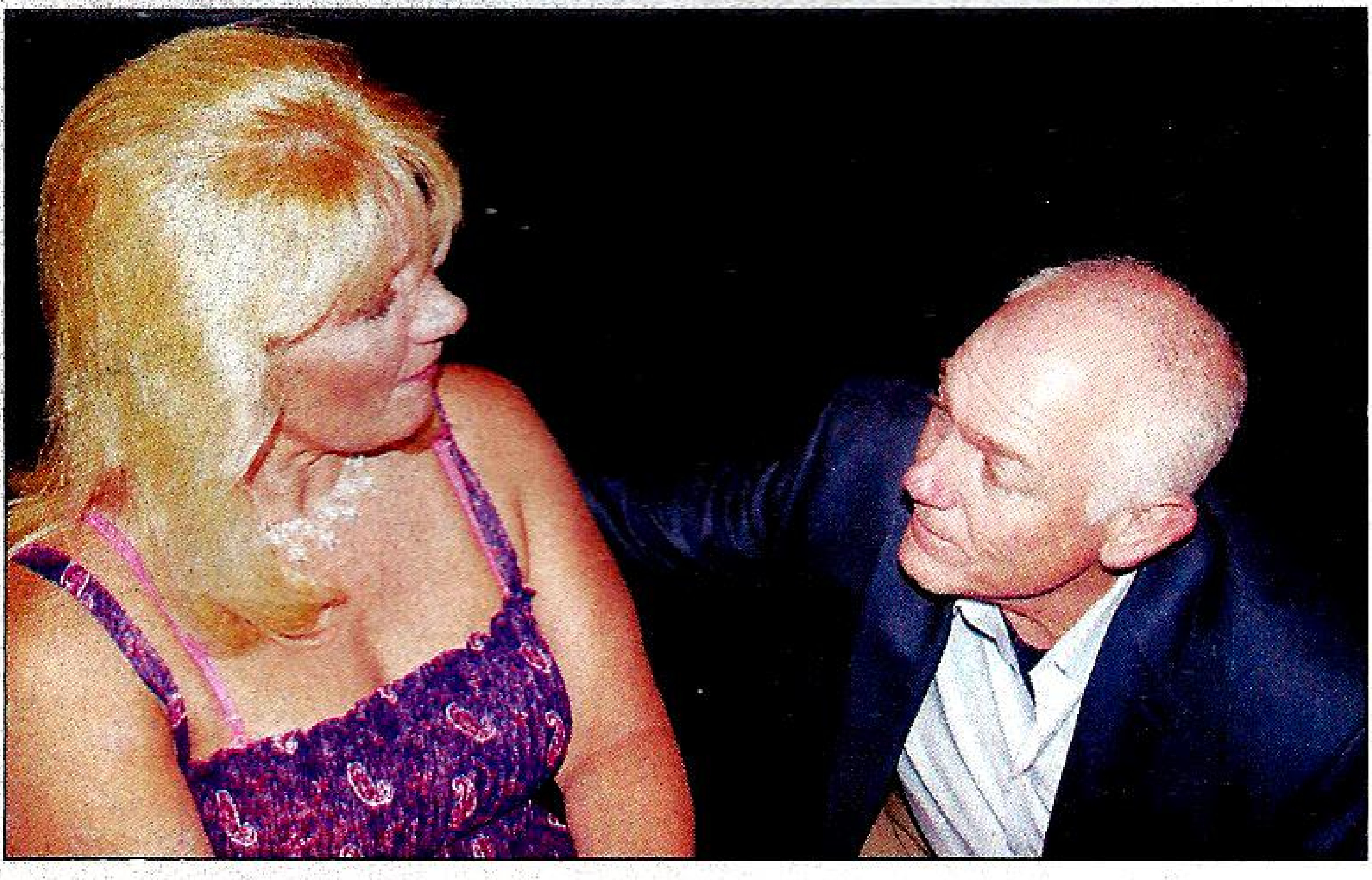

Photo by Dan Michaels

Dusty Rhodes won the services of Baby Doll for 30 days, leading to one of the most violent feuds in NWA history. Blanchard was voted second runner-up Most Hated by *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* readers in 1984.

Once the Rhodes feud tapered off, Blanchard found himself in an equally bloody war with Magnum T.A. (below), who, 14 years later, would manage Tully and Barry Windham to a version of the NWA tag team title (opposite page).

A: Oh, yeah. I traveled with him. He'd drive all night long to watch me play sports. He threw his arm out pitching for my batting practice and catching footballs. My dad and I were very close and still are very close.

Q: So how's he doing these days?

A: He's doing well. He's 82 years old, still alert and still living at home with my mom. They don't get to see their grandkids as much as they'd like, but they're doing well.

Q: Now that you're an expert at this thing called wrestling, a true student of the game …

A: *(Laughs)* These days, wrestling might have passed me by!

Q: What would you say was his greatest strength as a wrestler?

A: I didn't watch a lot of his matches. I can tell what was *not* his strength, because he's told me that. Mostly, it was his attitude. When you're the Big 8 champion in 1950 and you are a very, very talented shooter, you have a different attitude about the wrestling business. My dad has always shared with me that having that kind of mentality deep inside kept him from going on and becoming the best performer he could have been. I didn't have that problem because I didn't do amateur wrestling. I knew the image I was portraying, so thinking I was a real tough guy didn't enter my thought process. Does that make sense?

Q: Yes, it does.

A: But the few matches I did watch, my dad did a very, very good job—although I did hear from some of his contemporaries that he was a little stiff.

Q: What was the setup of the Southwest territory? Was your father the sole owner, and what was your role there?

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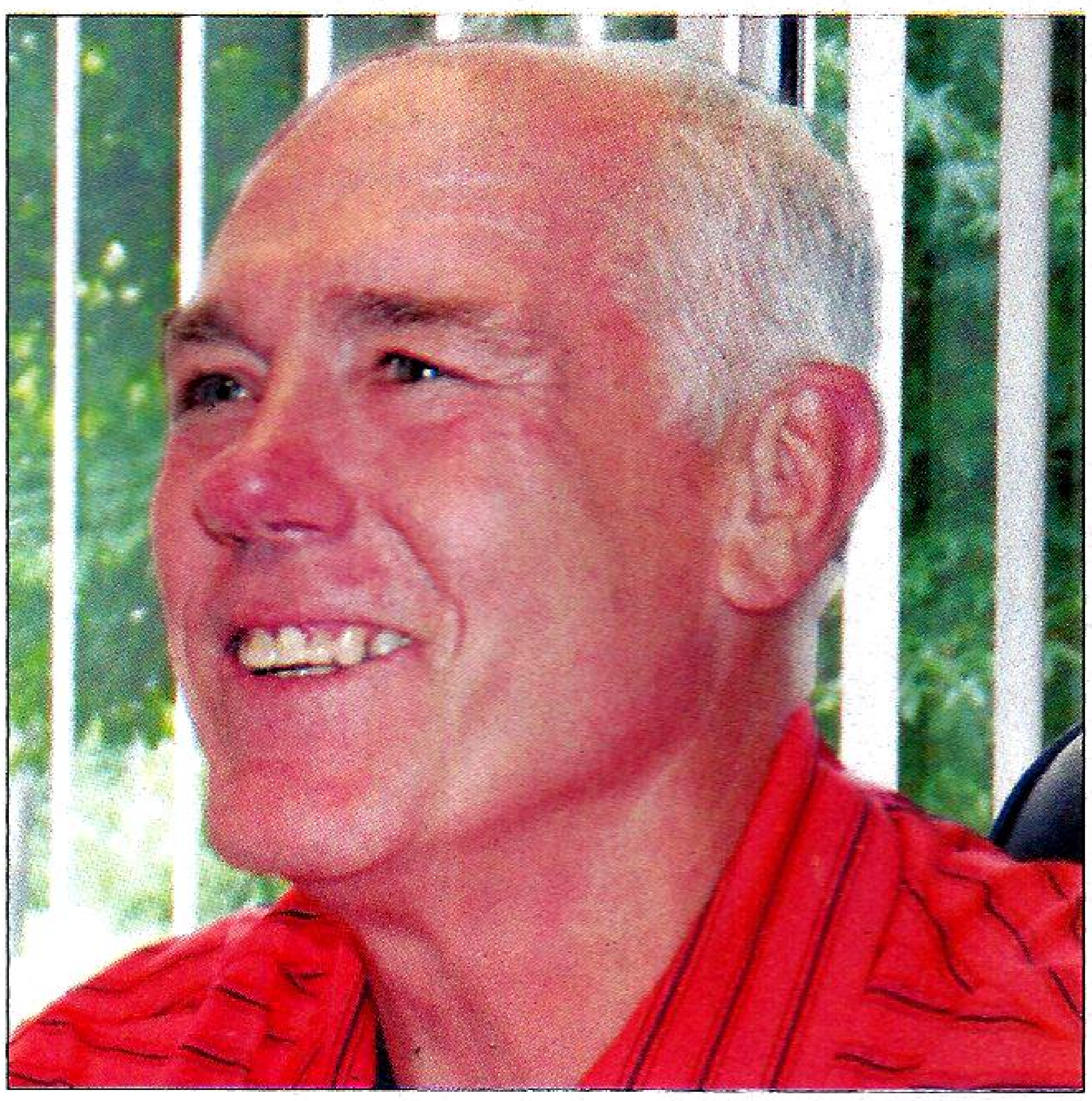


A: Actually, my dad and I were partners, but Wahoo was booker for a while, and so was Dick Slater and Buck Robley. I was a booker for a little while. We had some good talent, paid guys well, and did good business on a small scale. We had some big, big plans. But when we got on USA Network, we didn't have the right vision for how to make the TV show pay for itself.

Q: I remember one particularly ambitious plan, which was the undisputed world title tournament where Adrian Adonis became champion. Whose idea was that? Even Terry Funk was involved, right?

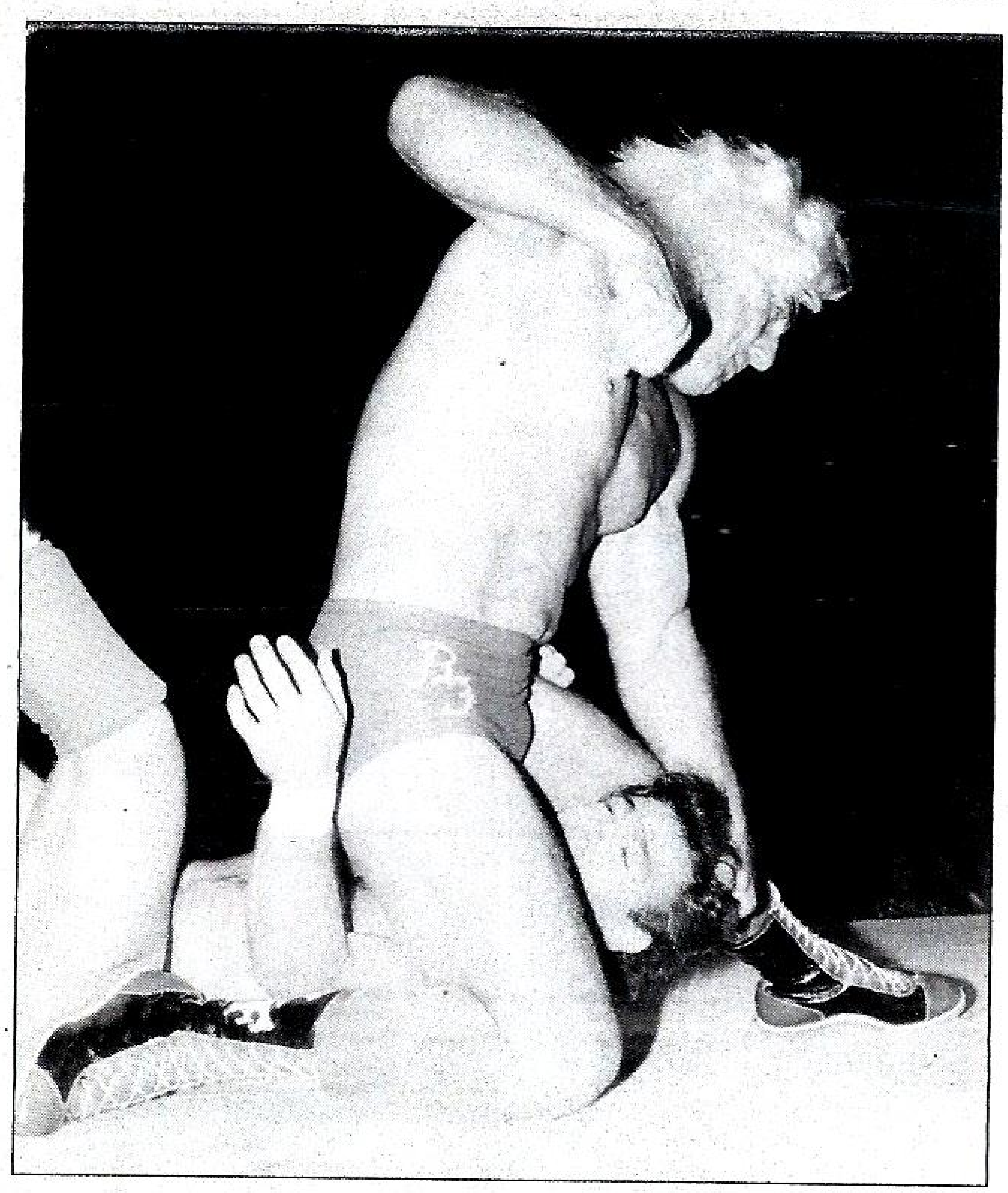
A: Terry Funk was there. And we sent telegrams to Hogan and Flair, who were world champions at the time, and put them on the air.

Q: And those guys chickened out. They didn't show.

A: Well … yeah. We were a small promotion and were considered outlaws at the time. But it was very, very interesting that a small promotion from South Texas was able to get on USA Network. We were on there for almost a year.

Q: A lot of fans still talk about your tag team with Gino Hernandez. How did you two come together and what kind of guy was he?

A: Gino had great talent. In fact, when I went to North Carolina in 1984, we called Gino to see if he would come.



Blanchard takes a pounding from NWA World champion Ric Flair. Their relationship would improve exponentially shortly after.

He was living in Dallas and working in World Class for the Von Erichs. He wanted to stay in Texas. I don't know … Gino might still be alive if he would've come to North Carolina and been part of this whole deal. But if he would've come out, I probably wouldn't have been part of the Horsemen. It was odd that I was in the Horsemen, anyway, because it was primarily seen as the Anderson family with Flair being the cousin. I was the only member of it who wasn't an Anderson. The only reason I was made part of it was because Dusty was the booker, and I was working a program with Dusty and he wanted matches with the Horsemen. So I got to be a part of The Four Horsemen. I'm very thankful.

Q: I recall the "Perfect 10" contest.

A: That was … different.

Q: You'll have to remind me how that worked. It came across like a legitimate contest, with you searching for a valet who was a "perfect 10." Did you do that just so a bunch of babes would send you their pictures?

A: Oh, we received pictures for six weeks. It was unbelievable. There were piles of pictures at the studio in Atlanta. We were actually looking for Sunshine, but nobody could find Sunshine. Nobody knew where she was.

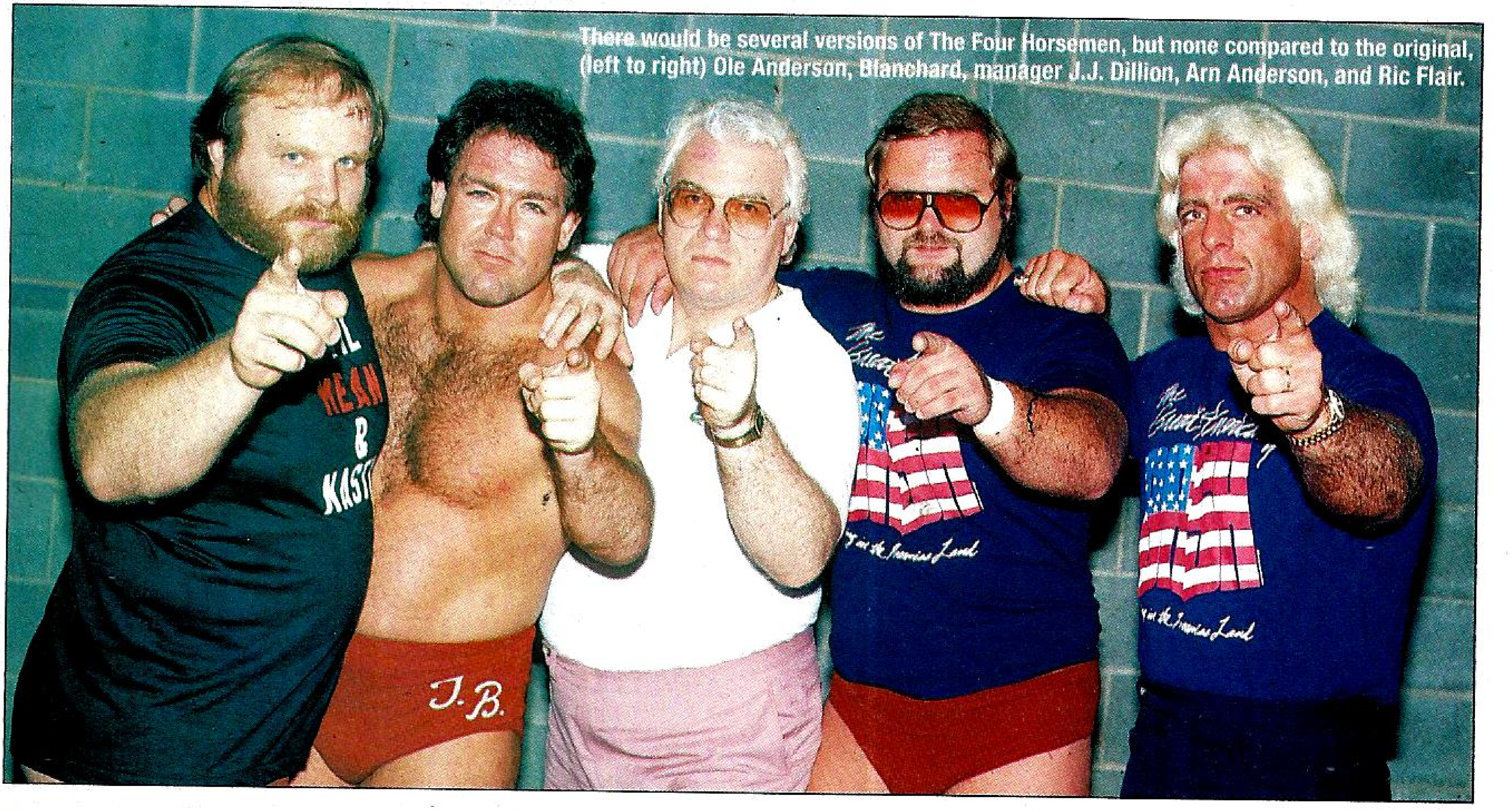
Q: She was out driving a truck with Aunt Stella Mae!

A: Whatever *(laughs)*. Because of Dusty's relationship with the Grahams in Florida, we did a four- or five-day tour down there after Christmas that year. Nickla was down there as Nickla the Lady Giant. Dusty and I saw her and immediately he and I ran to have a meeting. I said, "Dusty, that's Baby Doll." I believe the reason why people remember Baby Doll, other than the fact that she was very photogenic, is that she was taller and bigger than I was. If I'd walked out there with Sunshine or some type of model, she would've been a 10, but there was no heat in that.

Q: She was the first woman to be a physical threat.

A: Absolutely. For weeks, I talked about finding the world's perfect woman and delivered someone very unique. It was absolutely over.

Q: That was the era before "smart fans," but fans thought they were pretty smart when they made the connec-



There would be several versions of The Four Horsemen, but none compared to the original, (left to right) Ole Anderson, Blanchard, manager J.J. Dillion, Arn Anderson, and Ric Flair.

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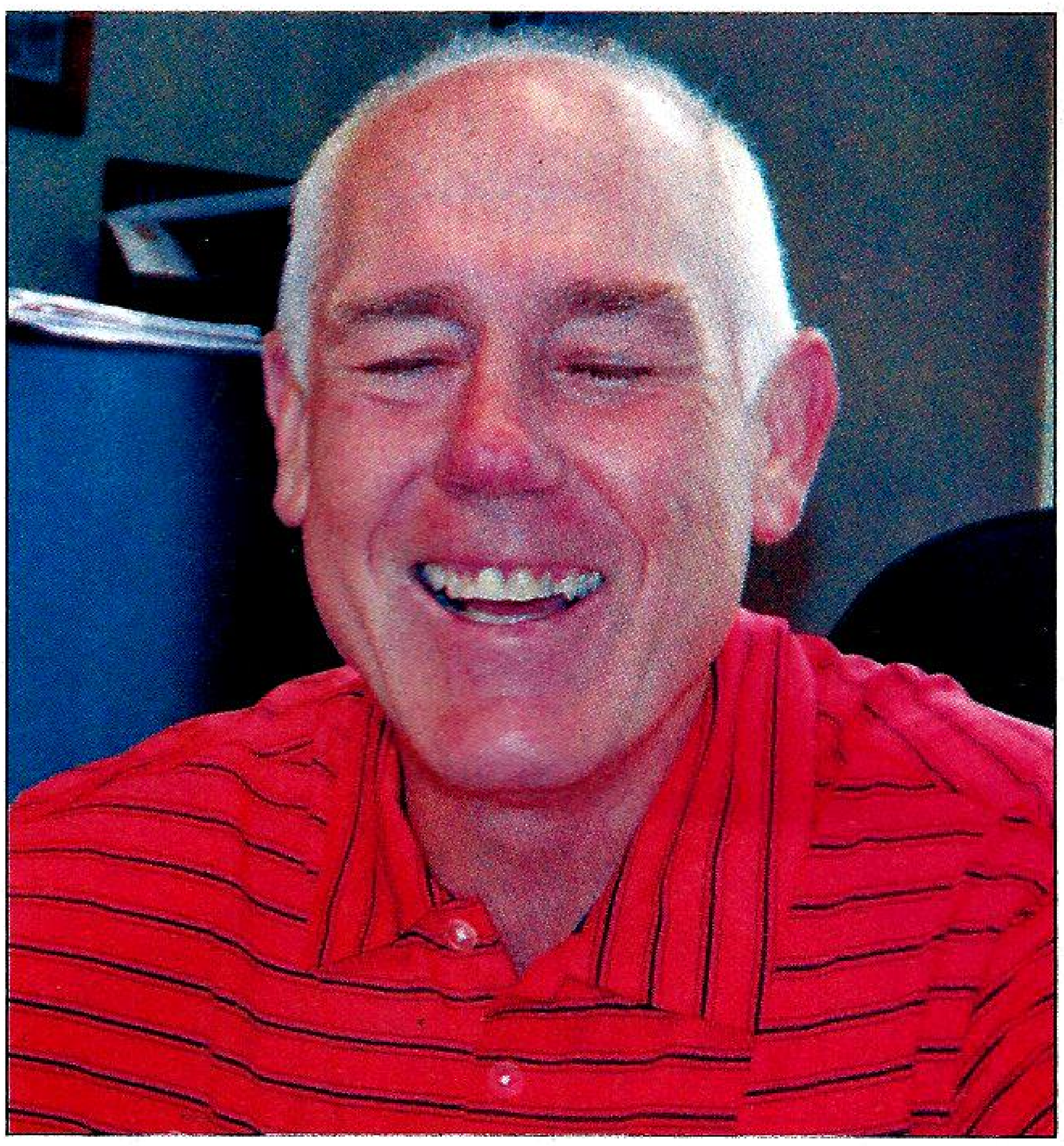


tion between the fact that Nickla had been Gino's valet before she all of a sudden popped up as your valet. They thought maybe Gino was doing you a favor.

A: I didn't even know she was Gino's valet!

Q: Yeah, she was, for a brief while in Texas. We've got the photos to prove it!

A: I didn't know that. That's how oblivious I was. When we had the match that summer, when Dusty beat me to get Baby Doll for 30 days, the place went crazy.

Q: Oh, absolutely. Then there were the vignettes where she had to clean out the stalls on Nelson Royal's farm. You might remember the video of you, when you first went to Crockett Promotions, in which you were portrayed as a sophisticated ladies man, refilling your glass with a lot of women in the room. That stuff seemed ahead of its time.

A: It was a little different. They wanted to do it, so I was all for it.

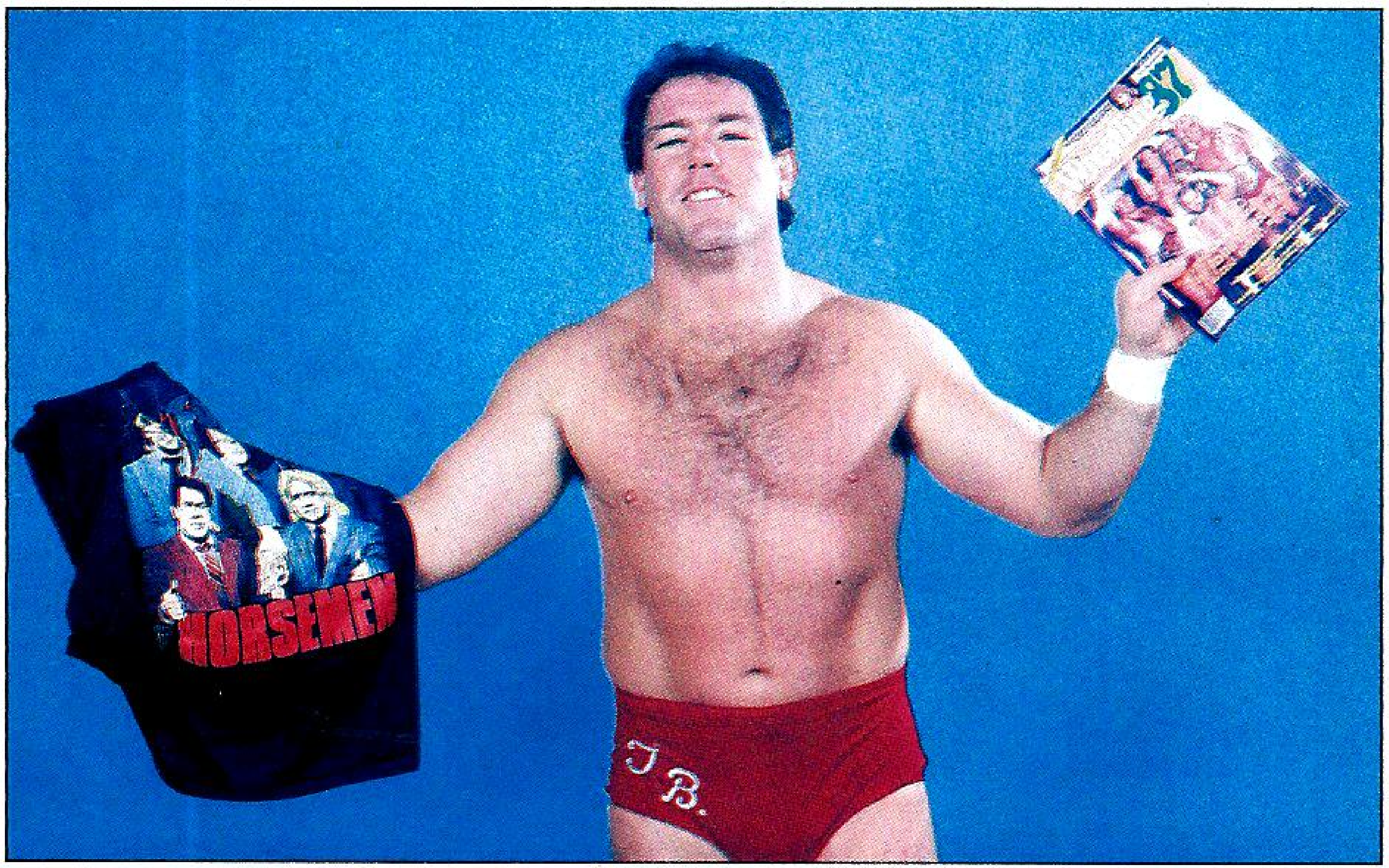
Q: Speaking of Dusty, he was a former World champion and the booker at the time, so it seemed odd that he pitted himself against you in all those TV title matches and he usually didn't come out on top. Why did he think that series of matches was a winner? Was it your chemistry together?

A: The deal was that nobody expected Dusty to be able to go for 20 minutes, period. When he first came in as the booker, he did a lot of 10- and 15-second matches during his first couple of months. My comment to him was that he needed to change that image. That's why we started having the 20-minute matches, and that's when the TV title became the World television championship. The fact that he was beating the crap out of me for 20 minutes changed the fans' perception of him. It was very successful at the time.

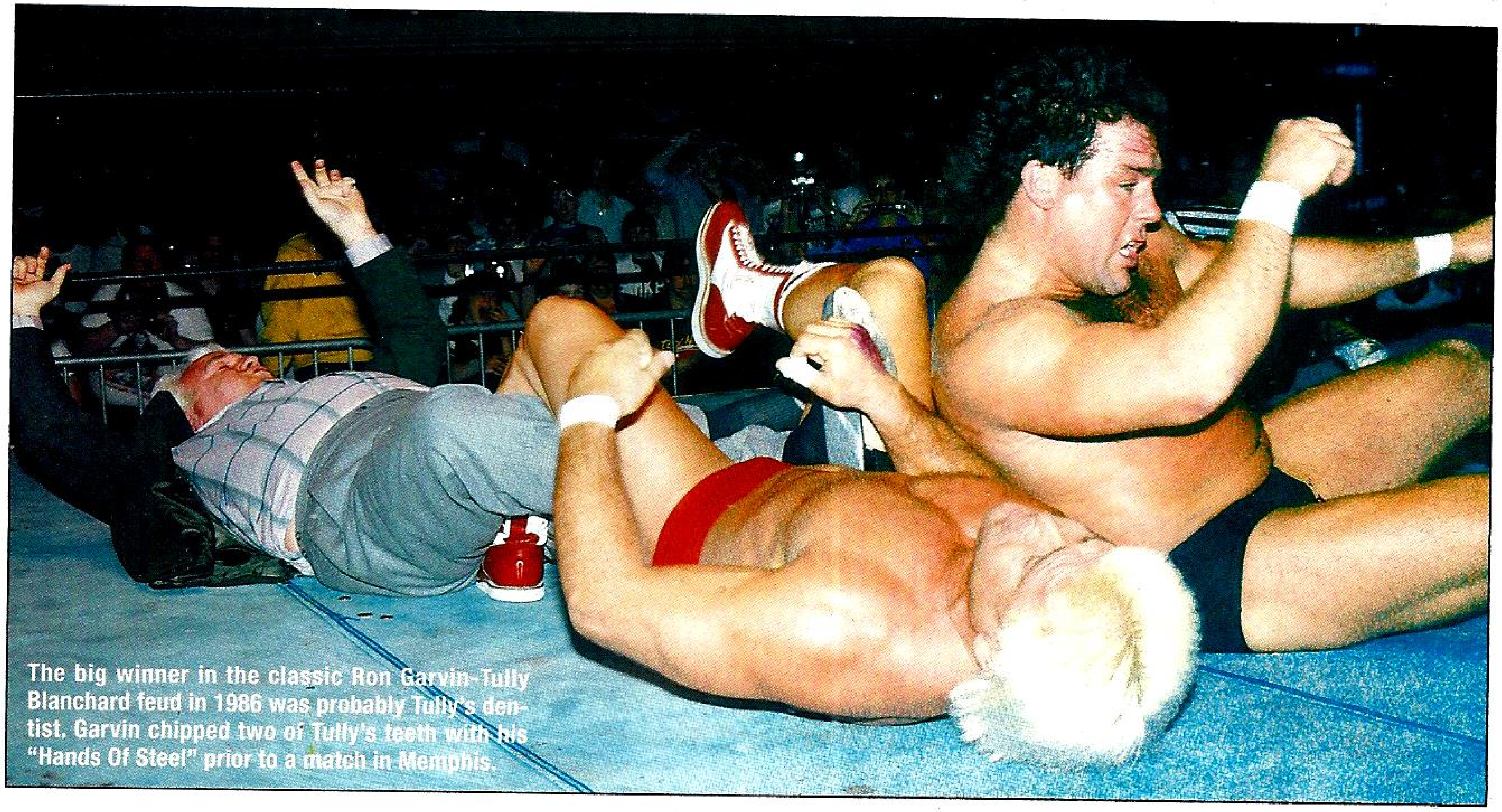
Q: People have talked a lot about the Rhodes-Flair rivalry, but it has always seemed to me that the Dusty-Tully rivalry was a little more violent, a little more personal.

A: I was in a great spot. Whenever we hit a wall or needed something to go with, they could throw me and Dusty back together and it worked. Any combination of Dusty and Magnum T.A. against me and Flair, or Dusty and Magnum against me and Arn always worked, too.

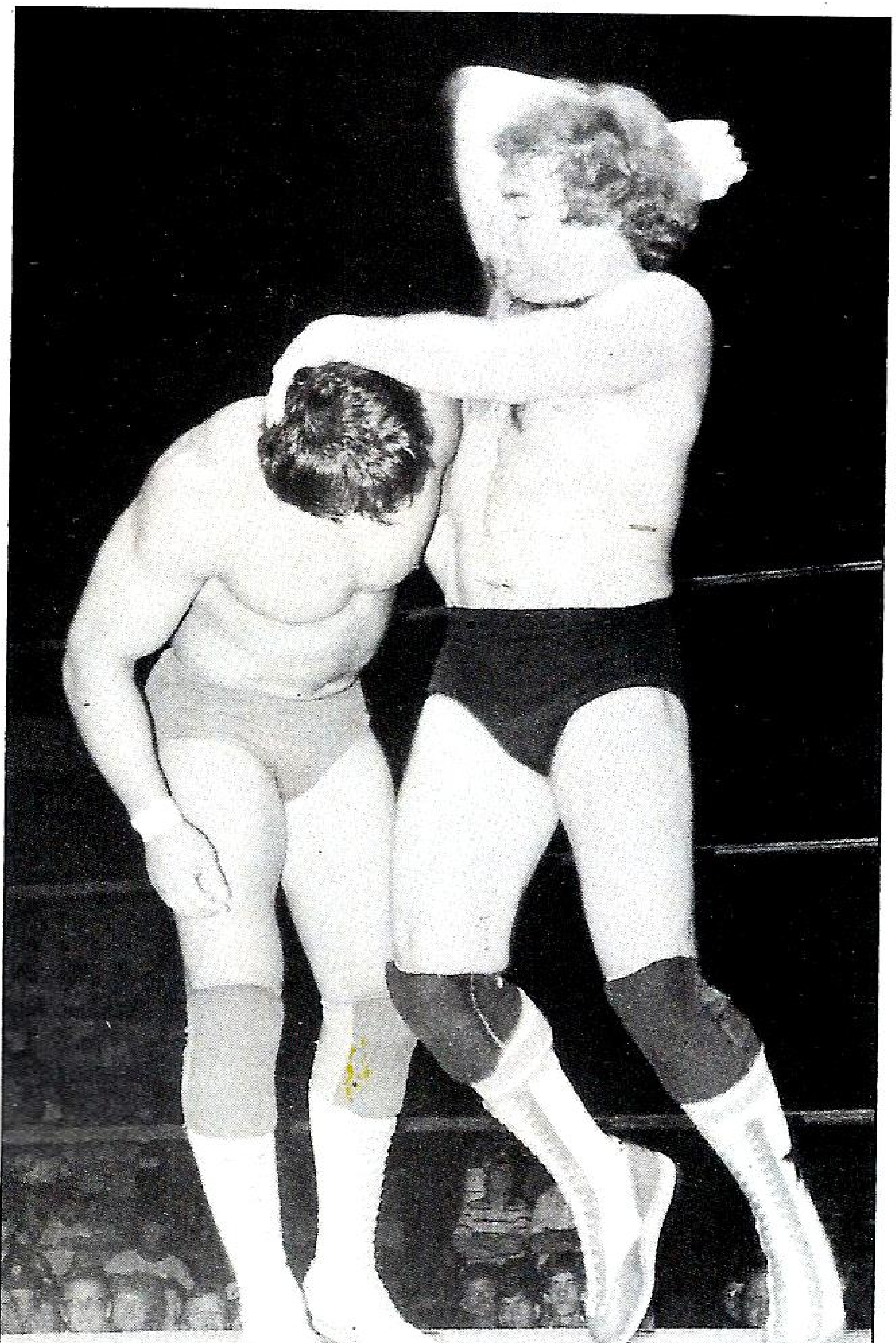
Q: I remember the intensity of your promos during that time. I recall you were having a series of barbed-wire matches against Dusty. You were all amped up and yelling into the camera, and you finally said, "Dusty, I don't care about being a pretty boy anymore!" That just struck me as hilarious. At what point do the scars not matter?



The Horsemen were both despised and respected by most fans, and that holds true to this day. Being a Horseman was the most enjoyable period in Blanchard's career.



The big winner in the classic Ron Garvin-Tully Blanchard feud in 1986 was probably Tully's dentist. Garvin chipped two of Tully's teeth with his "Hands Of Steel" prior to a match in Memphis.



The sleek and athletic Rick Steamboat provided a different type of challenge than Blanchard had grown accustomed to in the rough-and-tumble NWA.

A: I don't know, but the hardest match I was ever in was a bloodless barbed-wire match in Baltimore.

Q: A lot of violent matches took place in Baltimore during that time. But bloodless?

A: Well, this was soon after the state athletic commission outlawed blood. The match was horrible, impossible to do.

Q: We were talking about J.J. a while ago. He was the executive director of Tully Blanchard Enterprises. What exactly was Tully Blanchard Enterprises?

A: It was an actual corporation that I put together that was designed to promote my career. It was an actual entity. I didn't want to go on TV and talk about something that didn't really exist.

Q: That's incredible to me, that it was a real entity. I bet a lot of people don't realize that. You and J.J. exhibited more teamwork than any tag team I've ever seen. I remember him hitting your opponent with his shoe, taping your knuckles behind the referee's back, and tossing you rolls of coins.

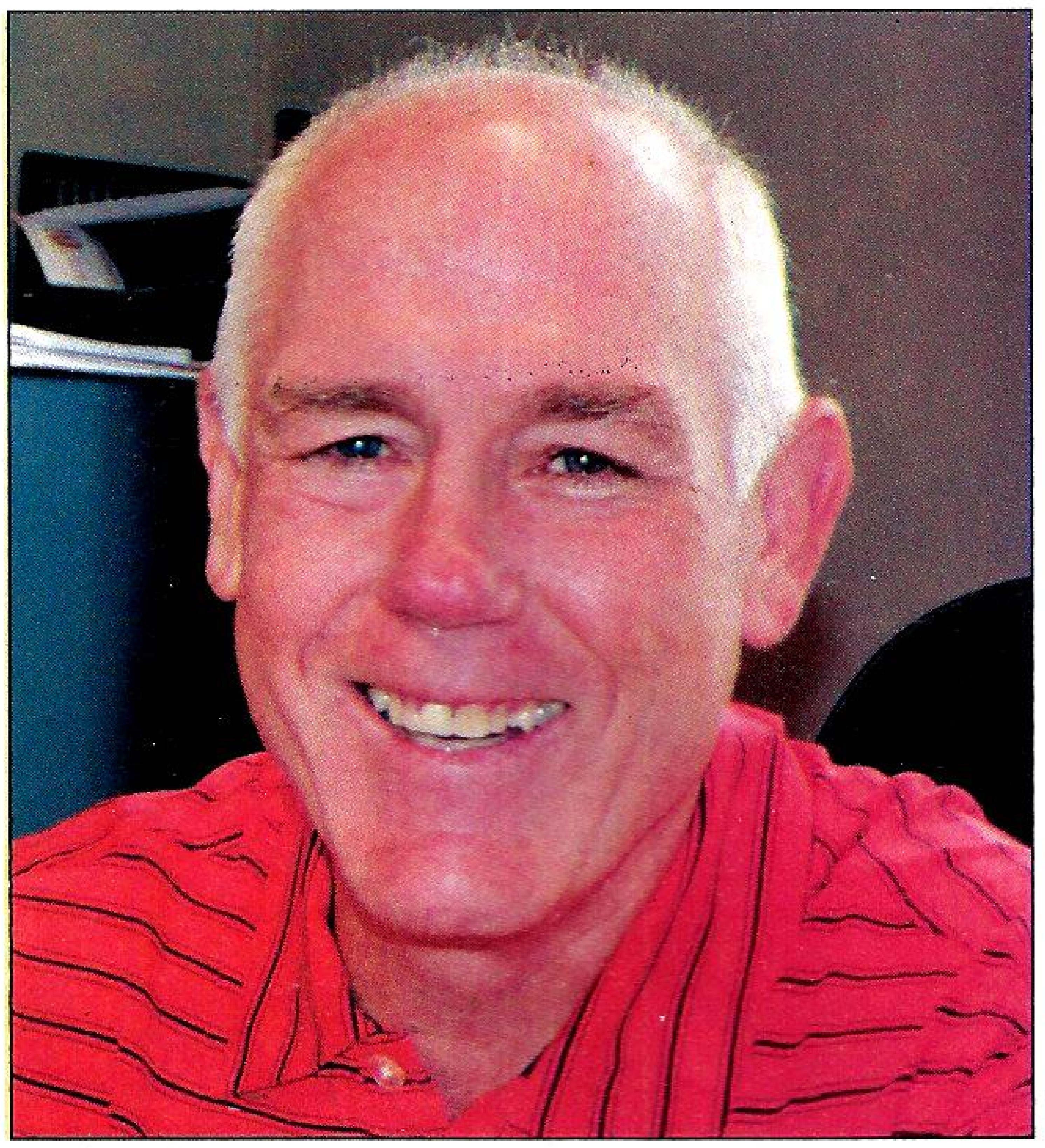
A: J.J. was awesome. He and I understood that we complemented each other. He wasn't trying to upstage me and I wasn't trying to upstage him. Everything was done for the sake of the match and the audience.

Q: To me, he was probably the most effective manager in wrestling because he came across like a serious person, not a buffoon. He was in silly situations sometimes, but, overall, he came across like a real-life manager.

A: And he was very articulate and educated, and he came across in that fashion.

Q: I'd like to ask you about your finisher, the slingshot suplex. You were the first person I'd ever seen do that. Did you invent that or pick it off somebody else?

"I believe the reason why people remember Baby Doll ... is that she was taller and bigger than I was. If I'd walked out there with Sunshine or some type of model, she would've been a 10, but there was no heat in that."



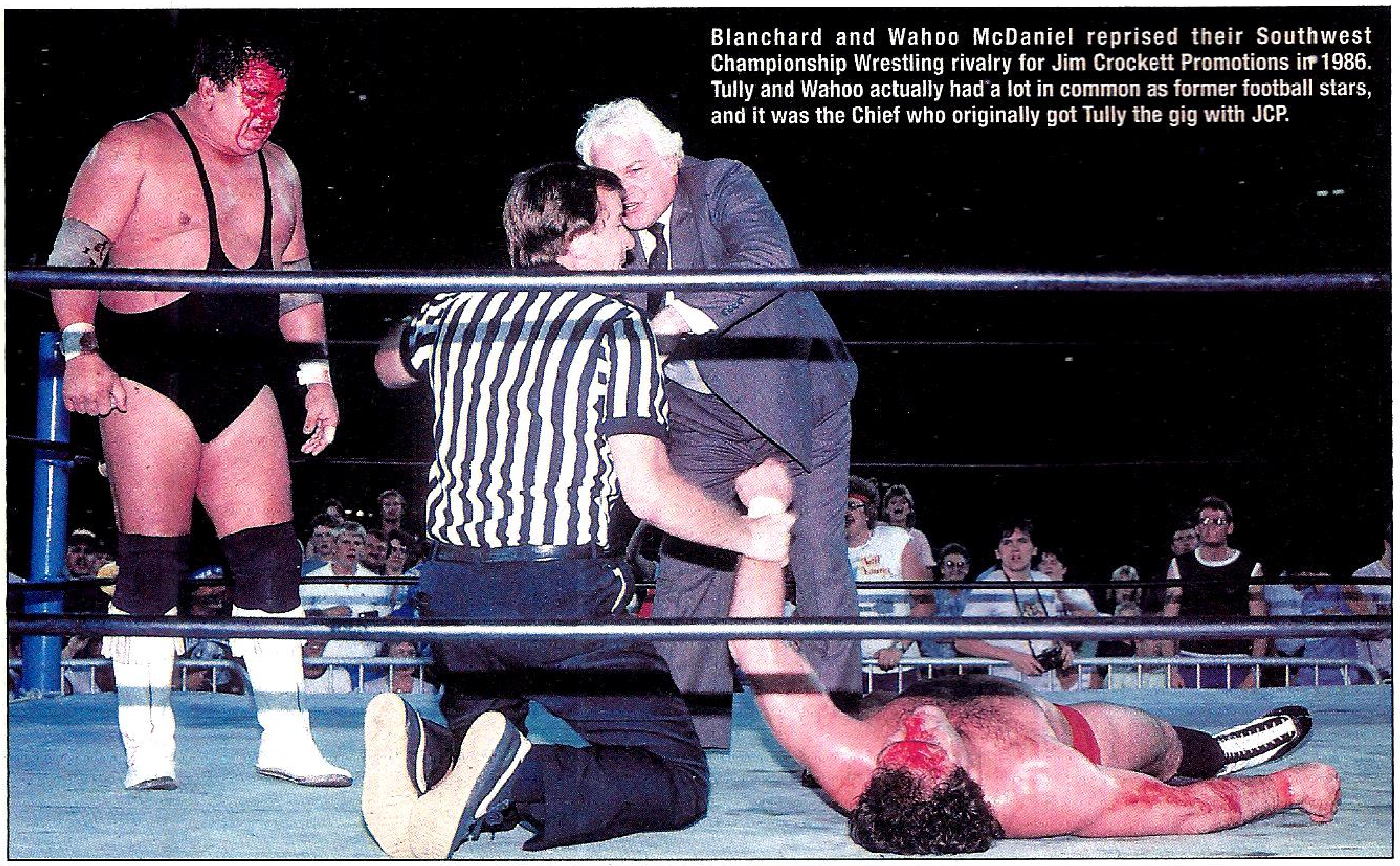
A: I noticed that Sgt. Slaughter used to drop guys on the top rope, on their waist, and I thought, *hmmmm*. I wondered if I could do that and then suplex a guy. And it worked.

Q: It made sense against a heavier guy like Dusty Rhodes because it seemed like you were using the rope to get a bounce, the momentum to get him over.

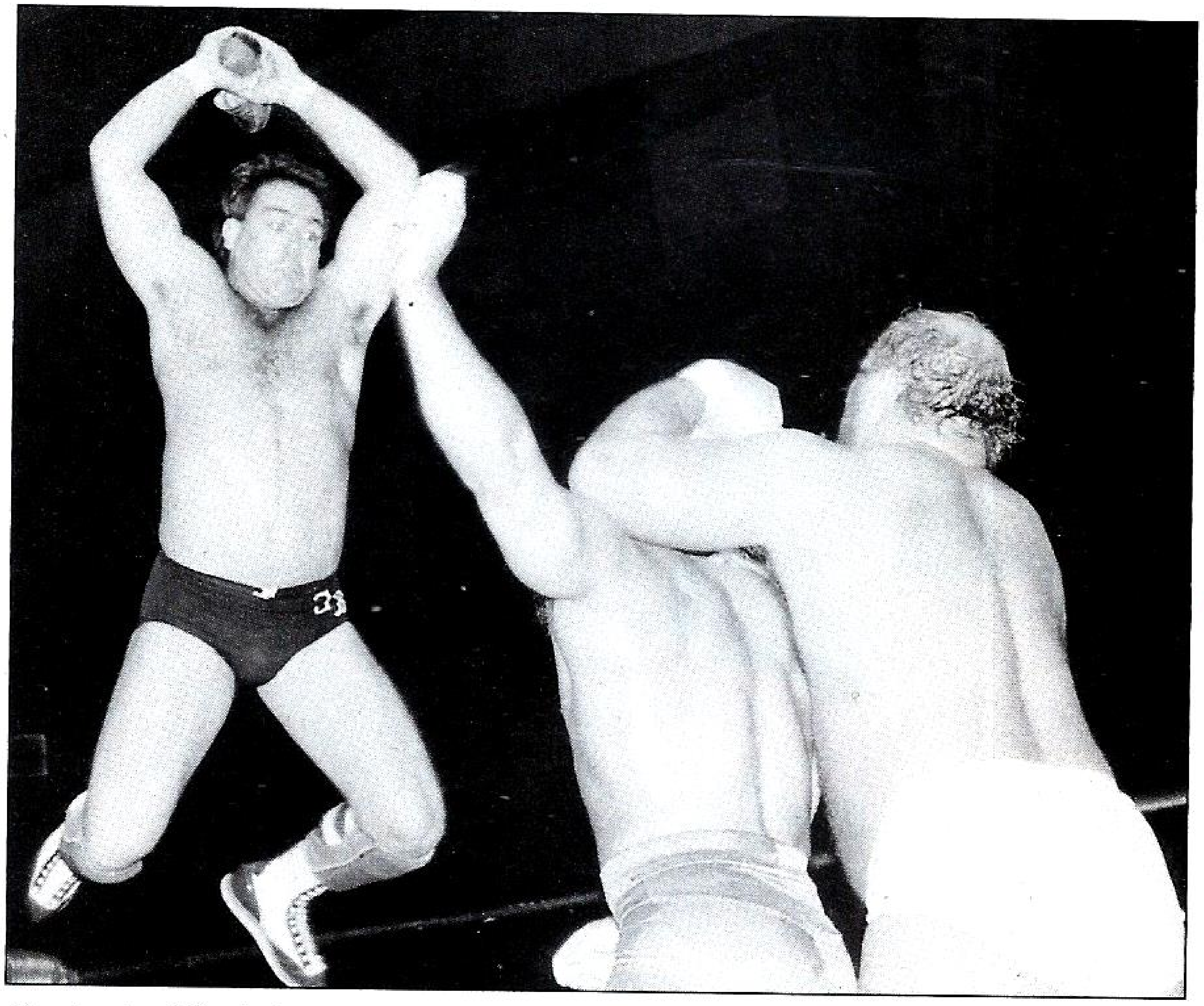
A: Absolutely.

Q: Rick Steamboat once told me that he considered himself the common denominator for a lot of great matches, and I'd agree with that, but it seemed that you also were a common denominator, but as a heel instead of a babyface.

A: Steamboat and I had some really great matches in 1984. In five straight time-limit draws leading up to Starrcade, going from 20 to 30 to 45 to 50 minutes. The last night was an hour time-limit for the TV title. Starrcade was one of those nights I got highly irritated, and almost got fired that night, too, because were only allowed to do 12 or 13 minutes at Starrcade after those great battles we had for the five shows leading up to it. I got in a lot of trouble for bleeding that night, but it was still a great match. I had great matches with Dusty and Wahoo, taped-fist matches with Ronnie Garvin, and Arn and I had great matches with The Rock 'n' Roll Express, The Road Warriors, and Demolition. But that was our role, to be the common denominator and have good matches with people. That was our job.



Blanchard and Wahoo McDaniel reprised their Southwest Championship Wrestling rivalry for Jim Crockett Promotions in 1986. Tully and Wahoo actually had a lot in common as former football stars, and it was the Chief who originally got Tully the gig with JCP.

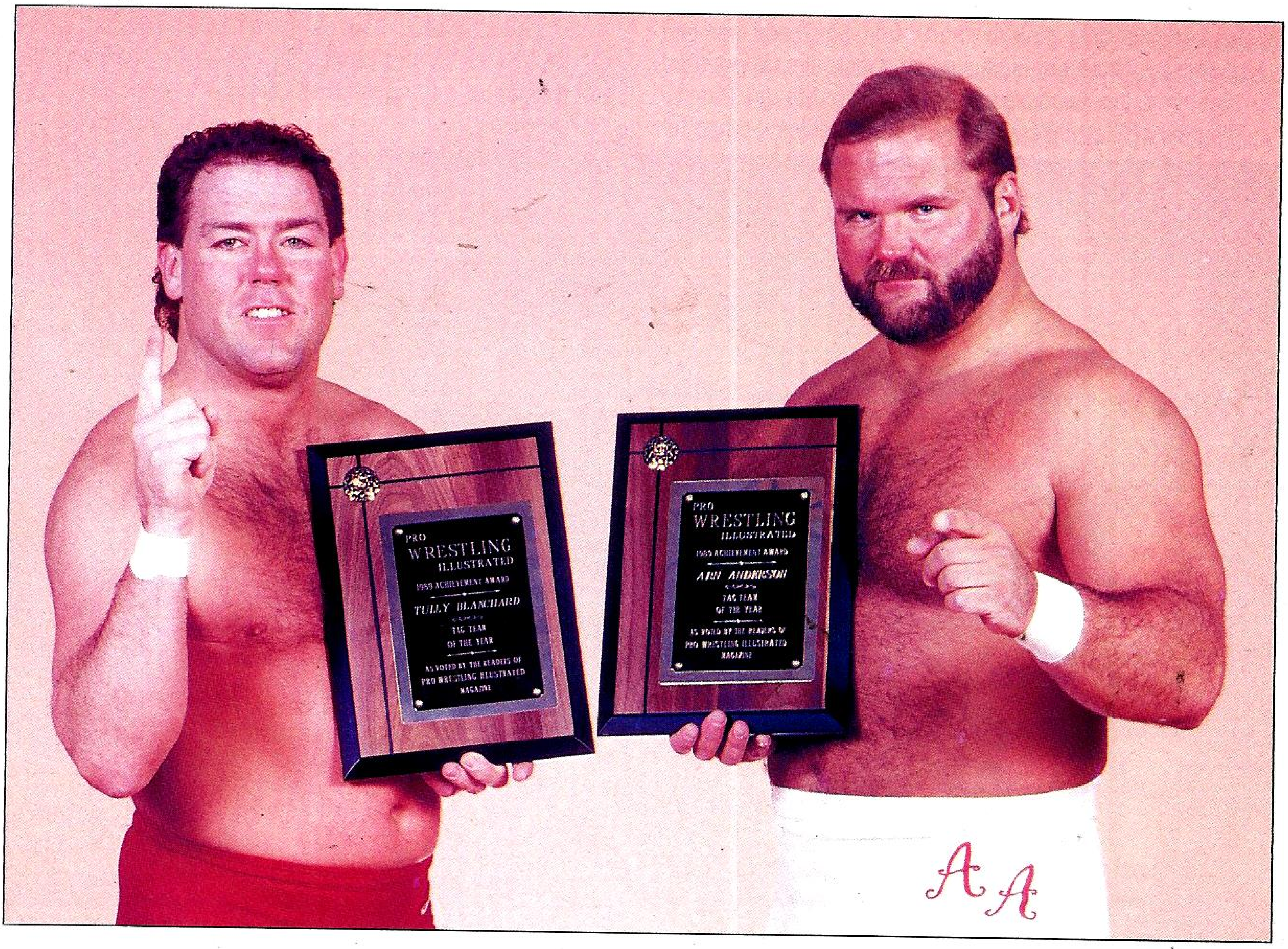


Blanchard and Arn Anderson put a hurting on Sting, who had a brief Horseman run that didn't work out so well (above). Tully was part of a lot of great tag teams over the years, but, in his opinion, none better than the one with Arn, with whom he displays the plaques for *PWI*'s Tag Team of the Year for 1989 (below).

Q: You mentioned Ronnie Garvin. I interviewed him a couple of years ago, and he said that you're still complaining because he knocked two of your front teeth out.

A: Oh, he didn't knock them out, but he chipped them before the match started *(laughs)*. I slapped him at the Liberty Bowl in Memphis, and he cold-cocked me and chipped my teeth. I was furious!

Q: I can imagine. One particular match between you two was very memorable. I'm thinking of the one-hour National title match on Worldwide Wrestling between you two. J.J. taped your fist behind the referee's back. Dusty was doing color commentary at ringside, and he taped Ronnie Garvin's fist in retaliation. Garvin knocked you out and it looked like he took


PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED
ACHIEVEMENT AWARD
TULLY BLANCHARD
TAG TEAM OF THE YEAR
AS VOTED BY THE READERS OF PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED MAGAZINE
PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED
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ARN ANDERSON
TAG TEAM OF THE YEAR
AS VOTED BY THE READERS OF PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED MAGAZINE
AA

> **"I was in a great spot. Whenever we hit a wall or needed something to go with, they could throw me and Dusty back together, and it worked."**

the title. But, whoops, the referee saw Garvin's taped fist and you retained the title.

A: That set up the Great American Bash on Tour for us. Those were some brutal nights, tough *(laughs)*. I earned my pay those nights.

Q: Back then, a guy could wrap his fist with tape and that was enough to knock someone out. Today, a sledgehammer might not even do the job. If there's one moment that you would consider the peak of The Four Horsemen, what would it be?

A: I was on my way to the airport at about 3:45 in the afternoon and pulled up behind a school bus on the corner of Woodlawn and South Boulevard in Charlotte, North Carolina. One of the students staring out of the back window recognized me. On his face, I could tell he was saying, "Oh, my God, that's one of the Horsemen!" On both sides of the bus, I don't think there was one kid who didn't have four fingers stuck out of the window.

Q: I should ask this: What kind of car were you driving?

A: I was driving my Mercedes, a 1987 300E. I actually had two of them. Twenty-three years later, when people come up to me and talk about the Horsemen, their countenance and entire mood changes. I look a little bit different, too. I'm only 196 pounds now, which is awesome because that's the same size I was when I played football in high school. I'm trying to stay trim and under 200 pounds. And my hair's a lot grayer and I'm moderately bald.

Q: But they still flash you the sign, I'm sure.

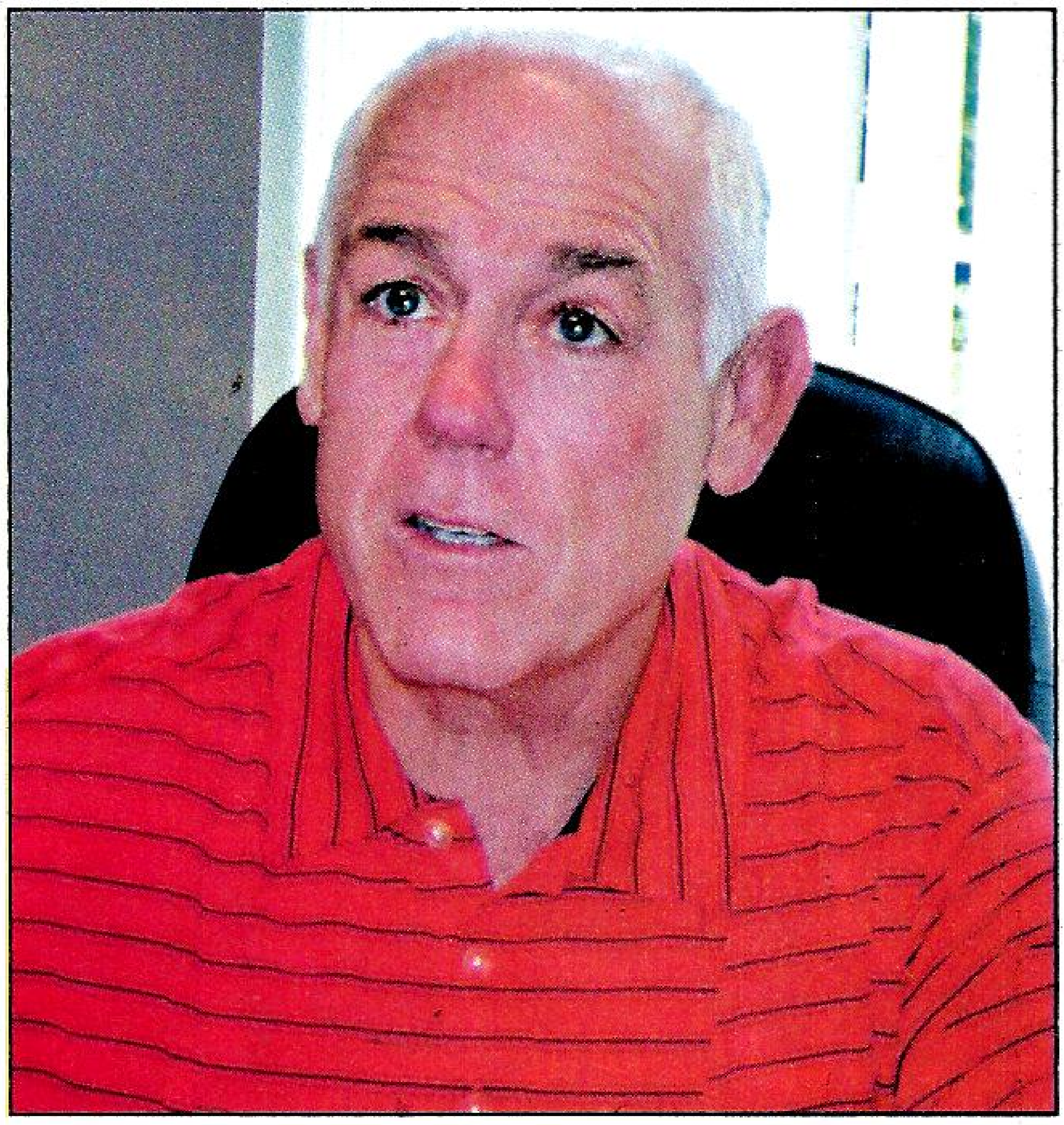
A: Certainly, people don't recognize me on sight near like they used to, but it was an amazing time in the history of that business. We sold out every night of the week for two or three years, no matter what building it was or what city it was. Business was phenomenal.

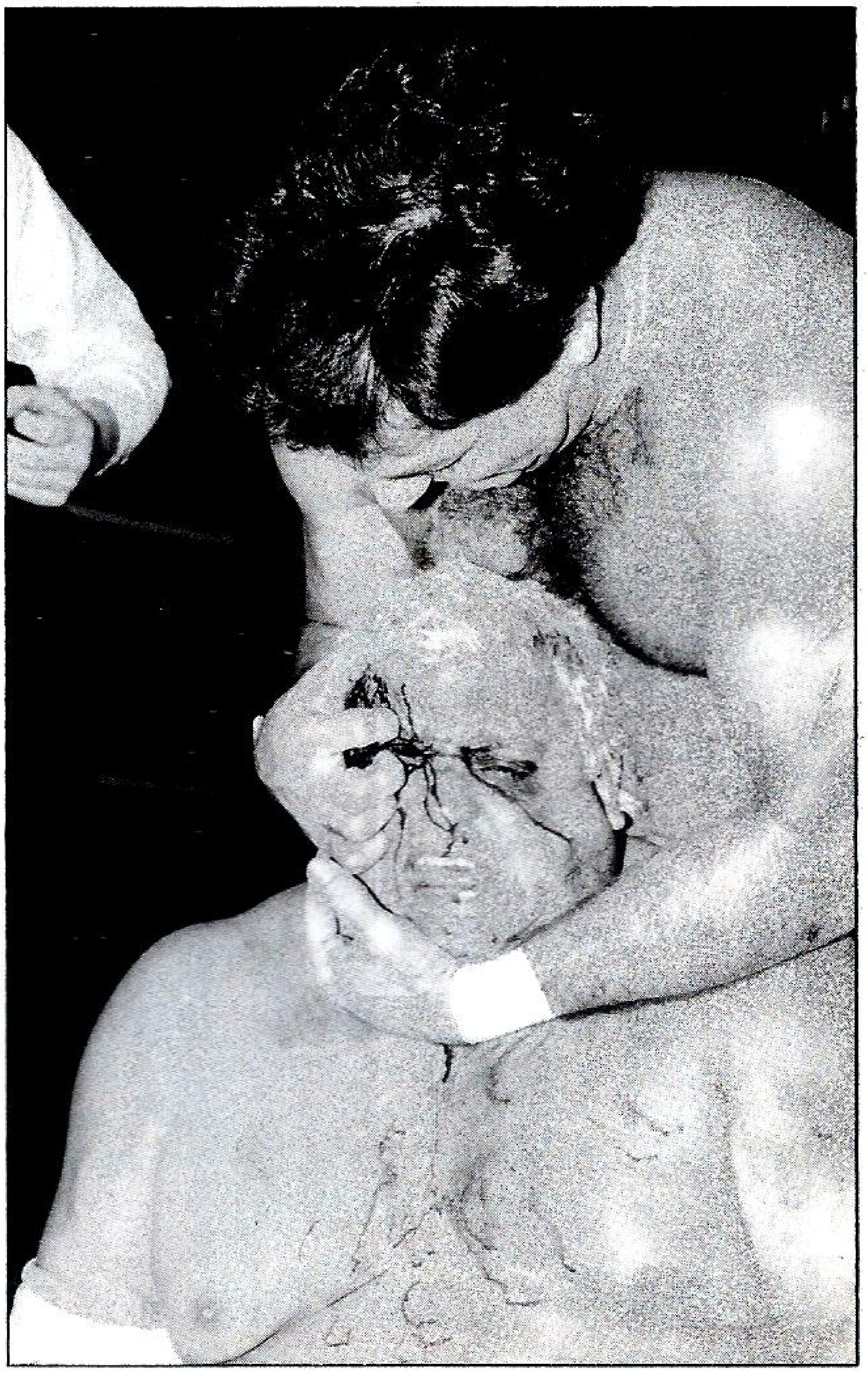
Q: You mentioned earlier that you didn't quite make it as a babyface, and that it all clicked for you as a heel. Something tells me that if you had turned babyface later in your career, that it would have worked very well. I think people would have loved to have seen you do that strut of yours as a babyface.

A: If I could've done it at the right time. I wrestled one time with ECW …

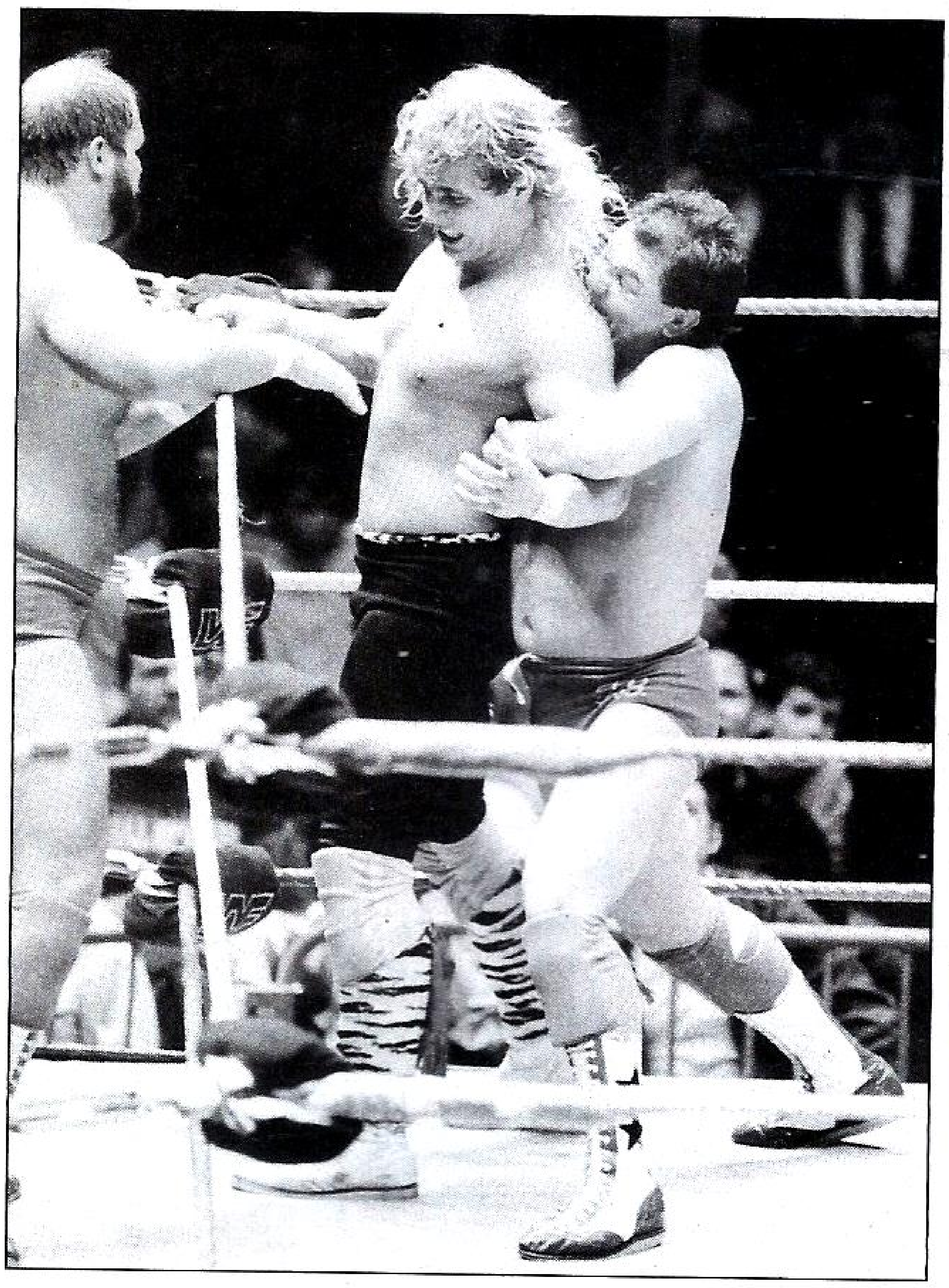
Q: Against Shane Douglas?

A: Against Shane Douglas. For about 25 minutes, the match was decent and maybe even good, but I was in a babyface role and he was in a heel role. Both of us, in my opinion, were like fish out of water, because he was a great babyface—very handsome, very rugged, very built. They want-

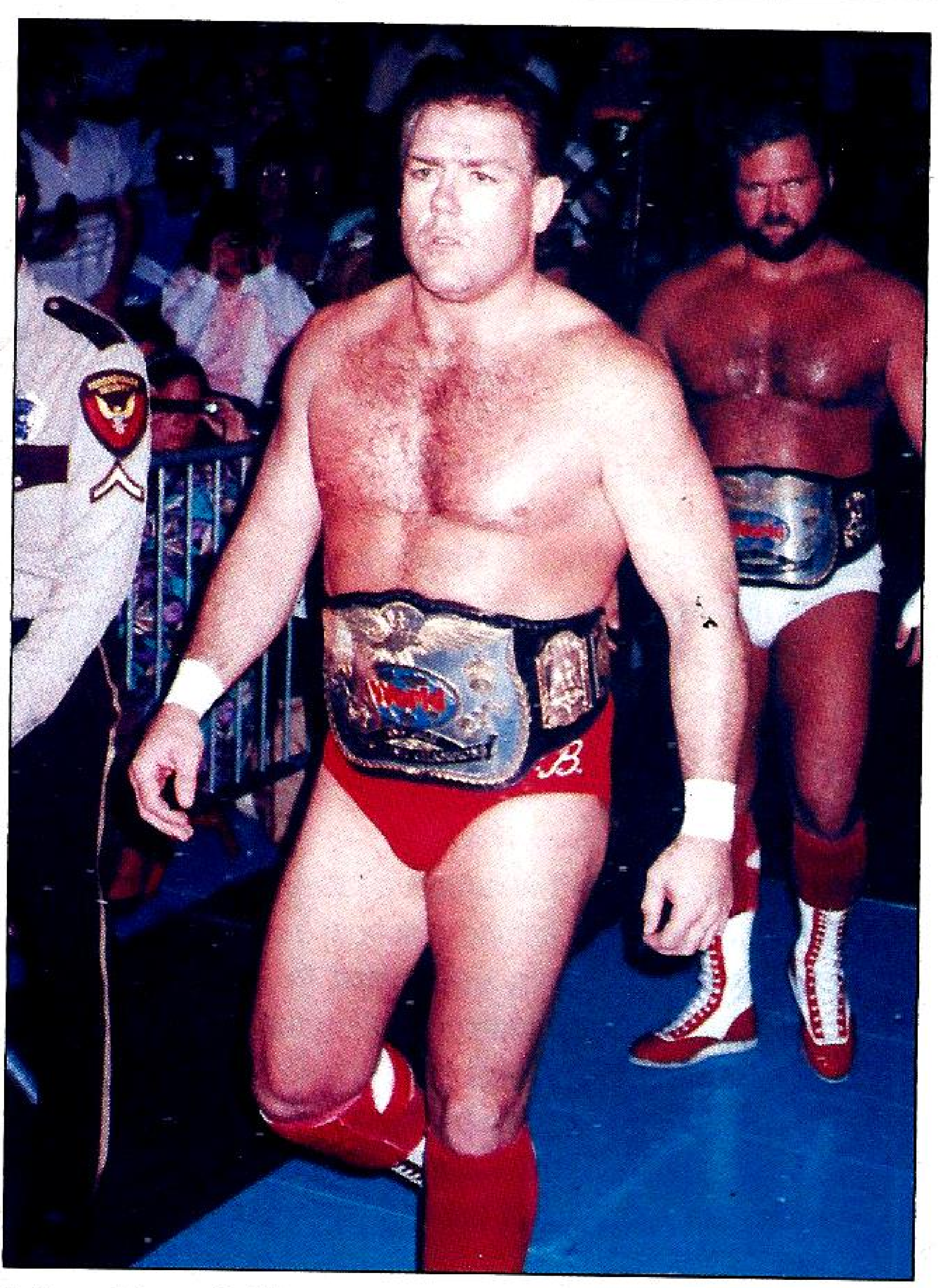




It didn't take much to spark the Blanchard-Rhodes fire back to life, as the two go at it viciously in 1988. A major career change was in the offing for Tully shortly thereafter.



Blanchard and Arn signed with the WWF in September '88 and staged a classic with The Rockers in their Madison Square Garden debuts the following January. The Brain Busters were managed by Bobby Heenan.



Tully and Arn ended Demolition's record 478-day WWF team title reign on the July 18, 1989, *Saturday Night's Main Event* on NBC, but lost it back to Ax and Smash a month-and-a-half later.

ed a 60-minute time-limit, but, at about the 25-minute mark, all the air went out of the room. It ended up not being one of my finest hours, but we both tried very, very hard. If I could've done what I wanted to do instinctively, it could've been different. But we did the best we could—it just started out much better than it ended.

Q: It seems amazing to me that you were doing 60-minute matches at that point.

A: It amazed me that they asked for that *(laughs).*

Q: Let's get back to the strut. It wasn't a Ric Flair strut or a Buddy Rogers strut. Yours had a little hustle to it. Where did you get that from?

A: At West Texas, there were a couple of running backs that were third and fourth string who thought they should be starting. And they had this attitude, a ga-ga pimp-walk thing. It used to irritate the crap out of me. So, later on, I figured that if I did it on purpose, then it surely would have to irritate somebody. I usually did it after I threw a dropkick I wasn't supposed to do, or an armdrag that I wasn't supposed to do.

Q: You were just rubbing everyone's faces in it a little bit.

A: Yeah, exactly.

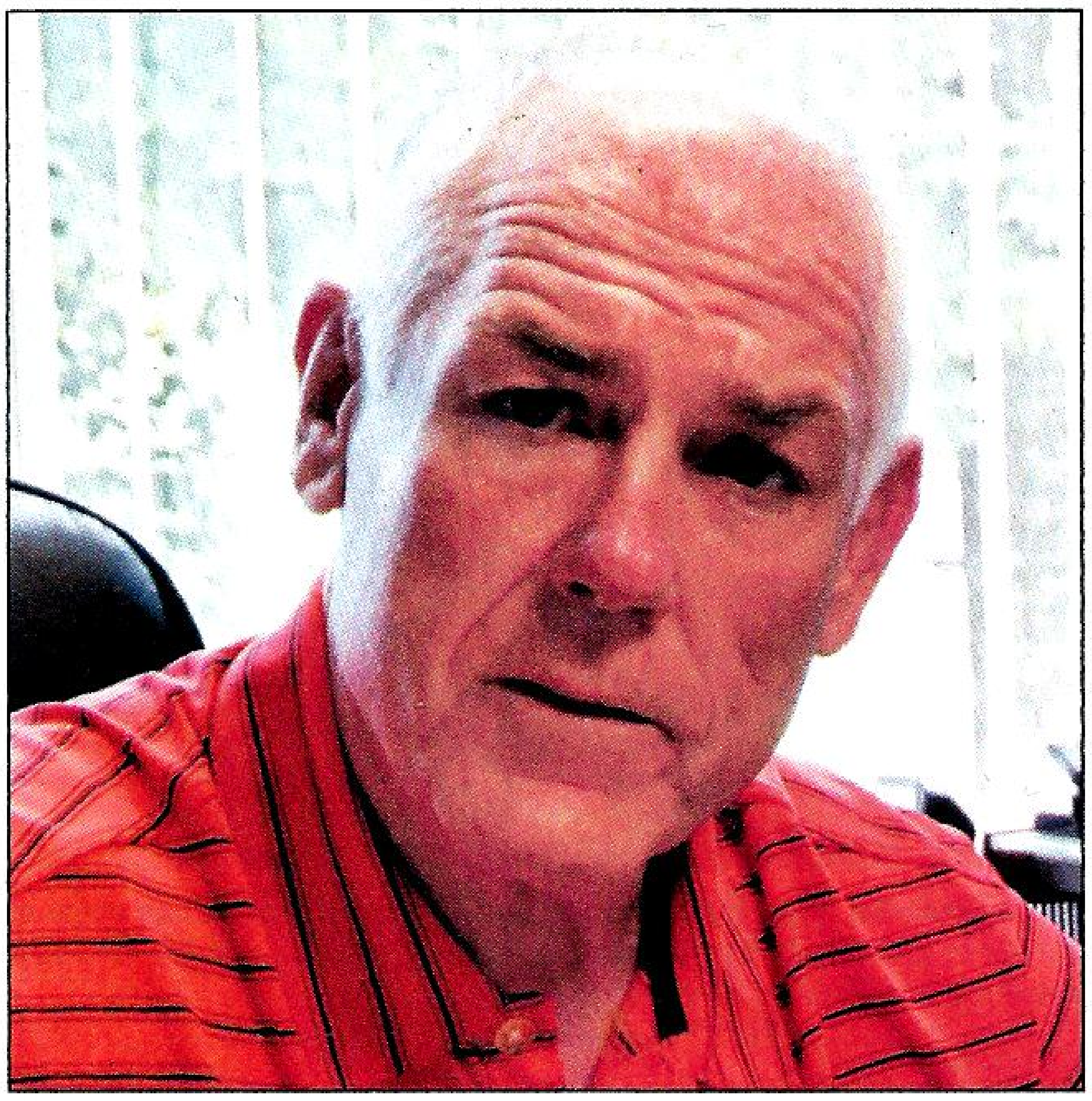
Q: I've never watched another wrestler who could wrestle a match flat on his back the entire time and still be entertaining. I think you were the best defensive wrestler of all-time. Some matches, you never took a step forward. But you didn't do the typical heel tactics, like stalling for time or untying the corner turnbuckle pad. You kept it high tempo.

A: Johnny Valentine told me, "If people respect you, they'll hate you even more."

Q: How so?

A: My goal, whether I was wrestling a match or creating an image for myself in a particular area, was to show people I could wrestle so they would respect my abilities. That way, when I chose to break the rules, they would think, *God, he really is nasty.* Everything I did was not so much on defense, but looking for that opening. There was a tactical reason for how everything was done. People want to come to wrestling matches to cheer, and, if they're not cheering, they're just sitting there. To watch their hero get beat up for 30 minutes was not what they came to do. And my job was to sell excitement. If you analyze my matches, the offensive part of my match—for my entire career—might have been 15 to 20 percent, and 80 percent of the match was the hero of the audience beating me up. Therefore, they got excited and their endorphins are released, and they got their money's worth for the $8 or $10 they would spend on a ticket back then. By doing that, and having enough energy to get up and down off the mat for 20 or 30 minutes, that just became my style.

> **"J.J. was awesome. He and I understood that we complemented each other. He wasn't trying to upstage me and I wasn't trying to upstage him. Everything was done for the sake of the match and the audience."**



Q: Also from the Johnny Valentine school, you never came off as cowardly. Many times, Dusty would be begging for you to come to the ring, and it would look like you were hiding behind Baby Doll, but you would tell Baby Doll, "Go give Dusty this message." It was more like you were stoking the fire, instead of being afraid of Dusty, which infuriated fans even more.

A: Oh, yeah, absolutely.

Q: You were talking about Arn. Obviously, you two had great chemistry. Not to put you on the spot, but would you say he was the best tag team partner you ever had?

A: I think Arn and I together were as good as a team has ever been in the wrestling business. He and I had the ability to go out there with The Rock 'n' Roll Express, and with Shawn Michaels and Marty Jannetty, and steal the show every night. And then we could do the same thing with Demolition and The Road Warriors.

Q: The WWF, especially at that time, was known for going on cruise control when doing house shows, but I recall that many of your tag team matches—even at regular house shows—received rave reviews at the time. In particular, there was one at Madison Square Garden—not on pay-per-view or *Saturday Night's Main Event*—where The Brainbusters and The Rockers had an unusually long match.

A: Oh, yeah, we went 25 or 30 minutes. That was the first time we'd wrestled in the Garden and we wanted to make sure that everyone in New York remembered us.

Q: Did you think Shawn Michaels would go on to have the success he did?

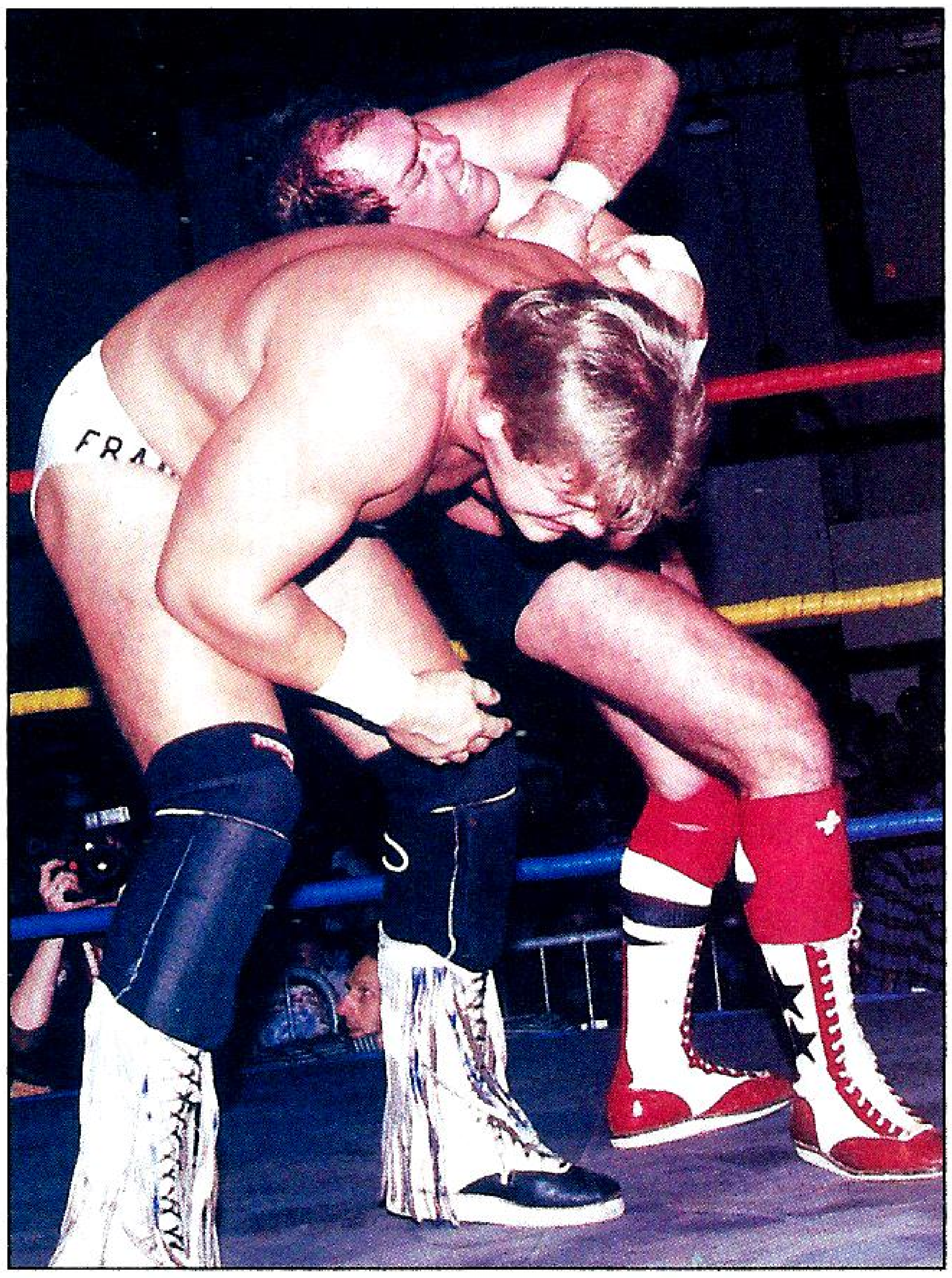
A: Absolutely. Shawn was one of the very few guys I remember that actually wanted to learn the business. Arn and I had many, many conversations with him at TV, talking with Shawn about what was happening and what we were trying to accomplish. Shawn had the looks, charisma, and the desire to become one of the greats in the wrestling business. And Vince certainly took care of him and he became one of the all-time legends.

Q: There was a bit of controversy a few years ago when you went back to WWE as a road agent, but you didn't stay very long …

A: I didn't go back as a road agent. That's where the conflict is. I was flown up there to do a job interview; that's not hiring somebody. They wanted to talk to me about working for them. I went to TV for two nights. The second night is when there was the chaos with the guy in the cowboy hat …

Q: JBL.

A: JBL. I don't know where that came from. I would have to be reminded of when I treated him so badly to get that kind of reaction out of the guy.



After failing a WWF drug test and having a deal with WCW blow up, Blanchard left the business as a full-time competitor to begin his Christian ministry. A lengthy 1995 comeback match against Shane Douglas in ECW did not go over well with the crowd.

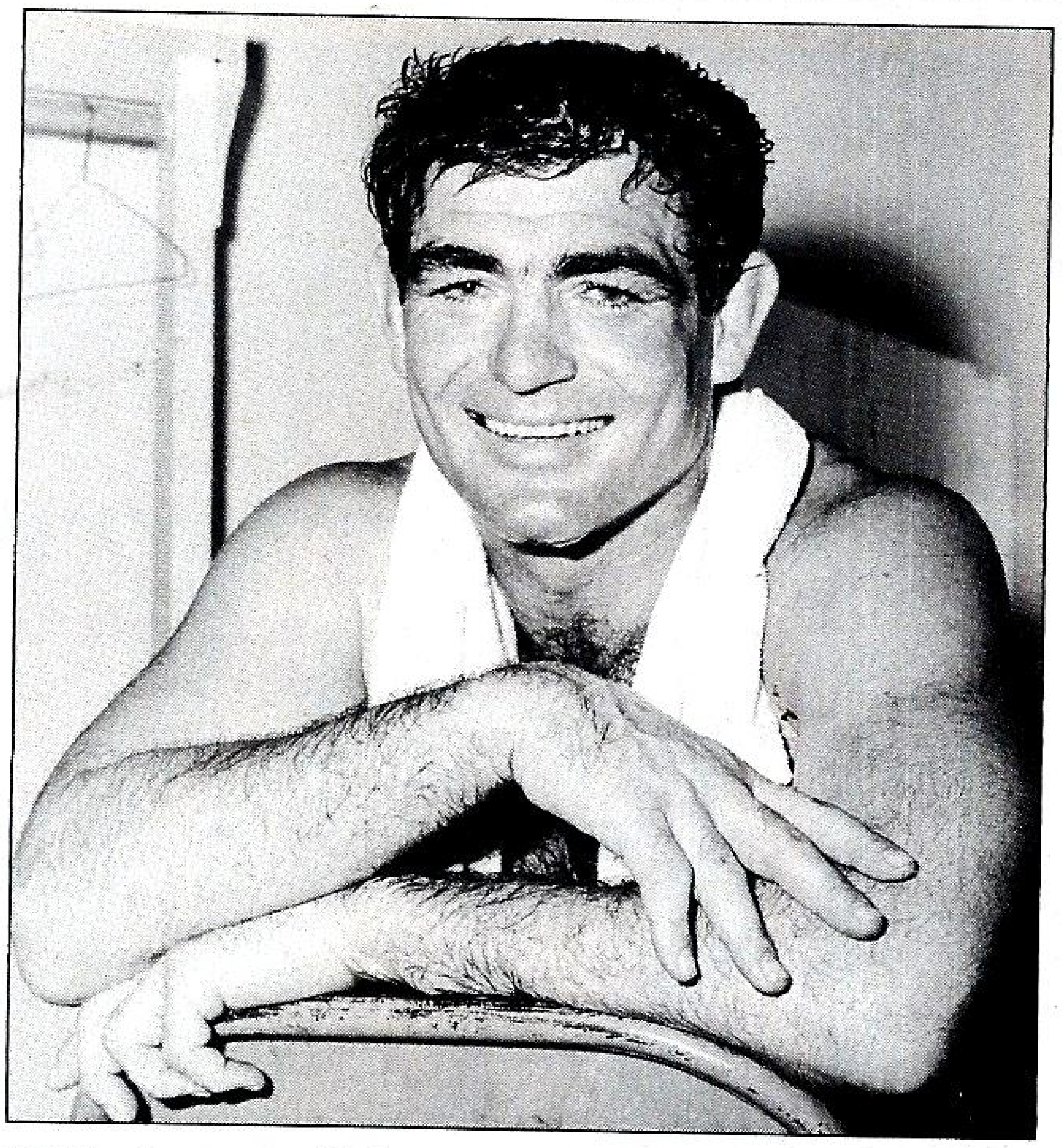
Dillon holds the ropes for Blanchard during a wrestling reunion show in Tampa in 2005. Tully has the utmost respect for J.J., and the two still converse frequently.

Q: Do you find it ironic that a person who has probably the worst reputation for hazing people unleashed on you like that?

A: I don't know. I said very seriously, very honestly, that I don't remember treating him badly. But knowing me back in those days, I could have, and I told him that I hope he could forgive me for treating him badly. I don't know if he wanted to fight. I hadn't been in that kind of dramatic situation in quite a while. That wouldn't have deterred me from working for WWE if I'd chosen to do so. They offered the job, but we never discussed finances. You don't really have a job if people aren't discussing finances.

I thought it was odd that, with my background in promotion and TV, nobody had ever asked me to be part of the writing team, a road agent, or whatever. When they called me up, they offered me a position, but not a salary. I saw Vince at our meeting the first day, and he told me the business had changed and that I should watch and absorb. That's what I was doing. Then JBL went off on his promo. I had to process all that. I was leaving St. Louis the next morning to do prison ministry in the panhandle of Florida, and his one statement kept ringing in my head: "You don't belong here." It had gone off like a light in my head when he said it. I thought, My gosh, he's right. I remembered a passage in the Bible where God used a donkey to talk to a prophet. Next day, I called John Laurinaitis up and told him that it was not the right time for me to leave what I was doing. I was engrained in the leadership of the ministry and it wasn't a good time to go back to the wrestling business. He was right. I didn't belong there. God was using somebody to give me a nice bit of advice.

Q: It seems like you have a good relationship with the company, even if at a distance. You were prominent on the Ric Flair & The Four Horsemen DVD a few years ago. It seems like, over time, you've come to embody the original Horsemen. So I guess you'll always have that connection with WWE.



Blanchard's career path, from college football star to pro wrestler, was not unlike that of his dad, Joe. This photo of Joe was taken just about the time when Tully began working for his dad's promotion, selling peanuts and popcorn to fans and sweeping up after the events.

A: Yeah, they had me come back for the big sendoff in Orlando when Flair retired. That was the first time in 20 years that Barry, Arn, and I had walked out on stage together. The response was deafening. Twenty years after the fact, it's amazing to me that people remember so much. Nobody in the history of the wrestling business has had a sendoff like Flair's—although he might have muddied the water a bit after that.

Q: What are you doing today?

A: I'm currently the chief operating officer for AE Global Media, which has its headquarters in Charlotte. I'm learning a new industry. Some days I'm successful, and some days I'm not so successful at it. But I'm growing and learning. I still go to speak in prisons and churches. And I'm trying to regain some lost time with my children, which divorce steals from families.

Q: How old are your children now?

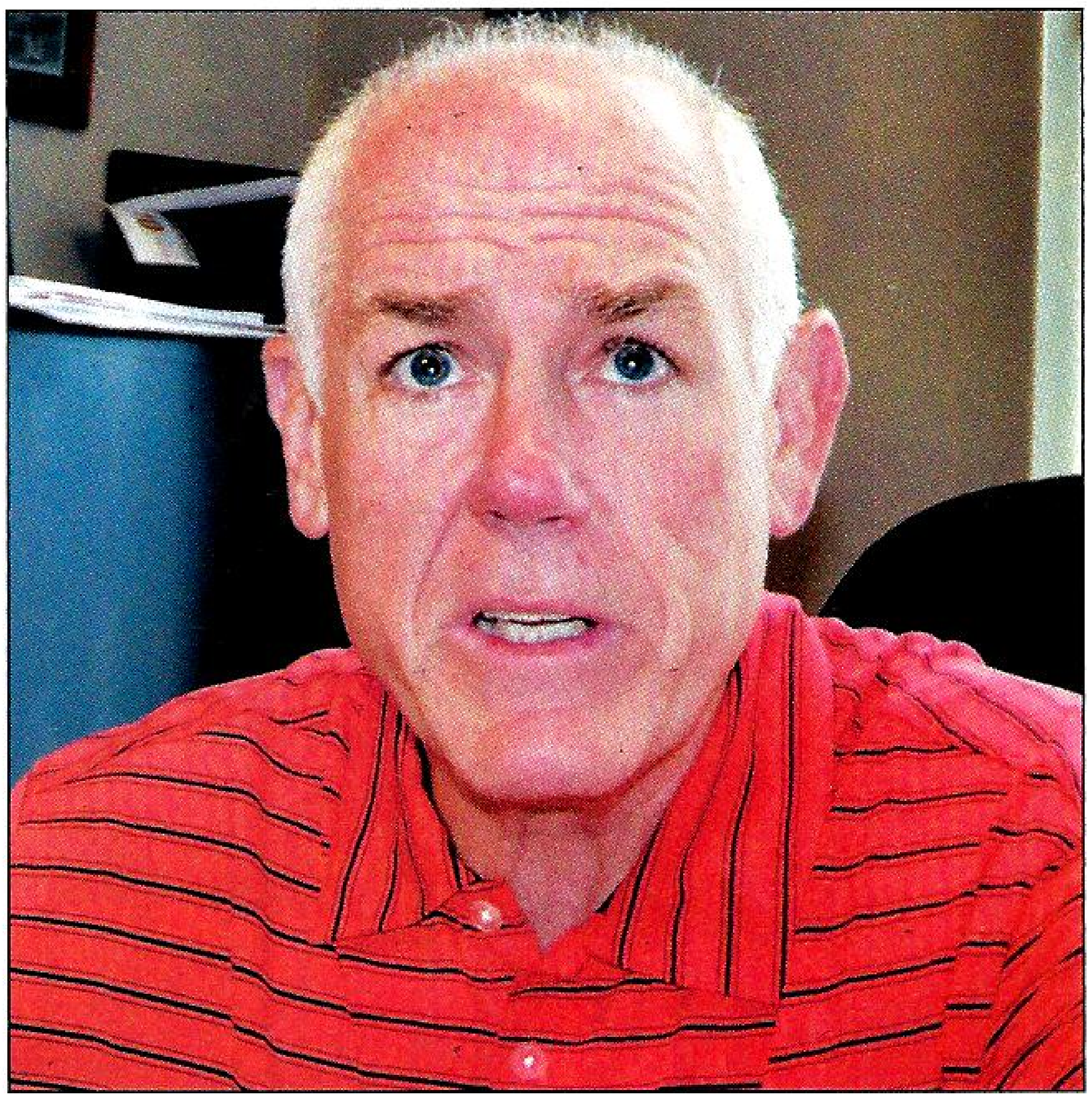
A: My oldest daughter, Taylor, is a junior in college and will be 20 in September. My son, Tanner, is 18. My middle daughter, Tessa, just turned 16. My youngest daughter, Tally, just turned 14. By the way, never—never—name your children with all the same letter.

Q: Do they hold it against you?

A: No, it just became very tongue-tying when they were growing up. When you want to talk to one, you have to go down the whole roster until you get to the one you want to talk to!

Q: Considering that you got out of full-time wrestling before age 40, do you look at that as a blessing now? You didn't have continued wear and tear on your body, and you've been able to adapt to new careers.

"There was a tactical reason for how everything was done. People want to come to wrestling matches to cheer, and, if they're not cheering, they're just sitting there ... My job was to sell excitement."



A: Oh, I could hit a golf ball farther at 47 than I could at 37. I can still do many things; taking bumps is not one of them. I still work out, I still do step-ups, I still do benchpresses, I still do push-ups, I still do rollers, and I can still swing a golf club. Notice that I didn't say how far I could hit the ball, just that I could hit it farther than when I was 37.

Q: Are you remarried? What's your life like down there in North Carolina?

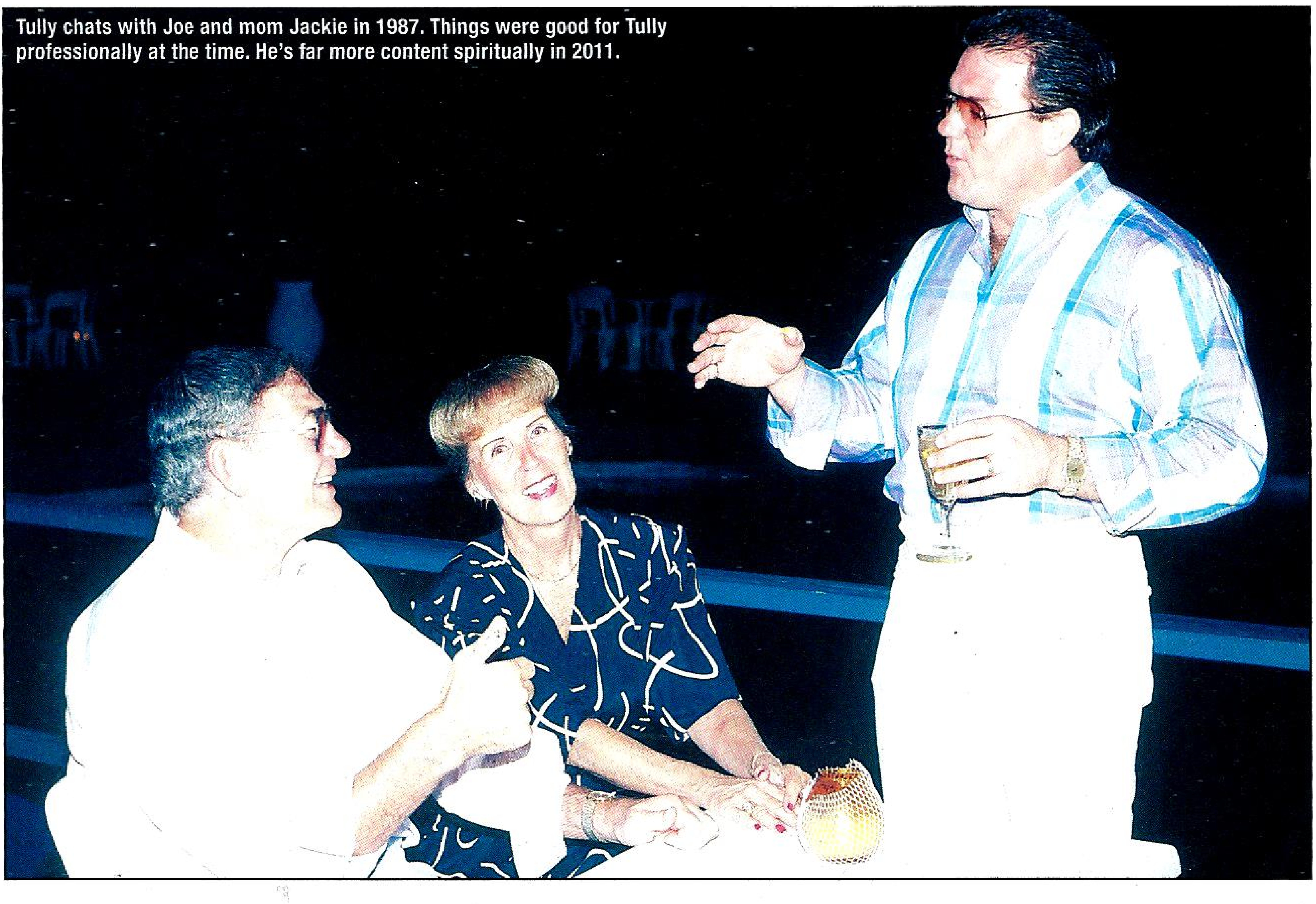
A: My son lives with me. He's getting ready to be a freshman in college. I attend church at Elevation Church, which is a very dynamic church, probably the fastest-growing church in America. I think they just had their sixth anniversary, and there are over 12,000 people attending at four different locations. So my children and I go to church, go to work, and try to be a good family.

Q: That sounds terrific. When fans think of your career, what would you like to be remembered for?

A: Being an entertainer. My dad told me at an early age that this is the entertainment business.

Q: One final question: People are still wondering how you survived all those Four Horsemen parties. Was it because you took those Four Horsemen vitamins?

A: I did take Four Horsemen vitamins for a while. I participated enough at those parties, but one of my favorite pastimes was being a people-watcher. Sometimes, I was just a spectator. ☐



Tully chats with Joe and mom Jackie in 1987. Things were good for Tully professionally at the time. He's far more content spiritually in 2011.

TEAM 3-D GETS SPIKED!

{"STOP EMBARRASSING THE FAMILY NAME!"}

BY SPIKE "BROTHER RUNT" DUDLEY
PHOTOS BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

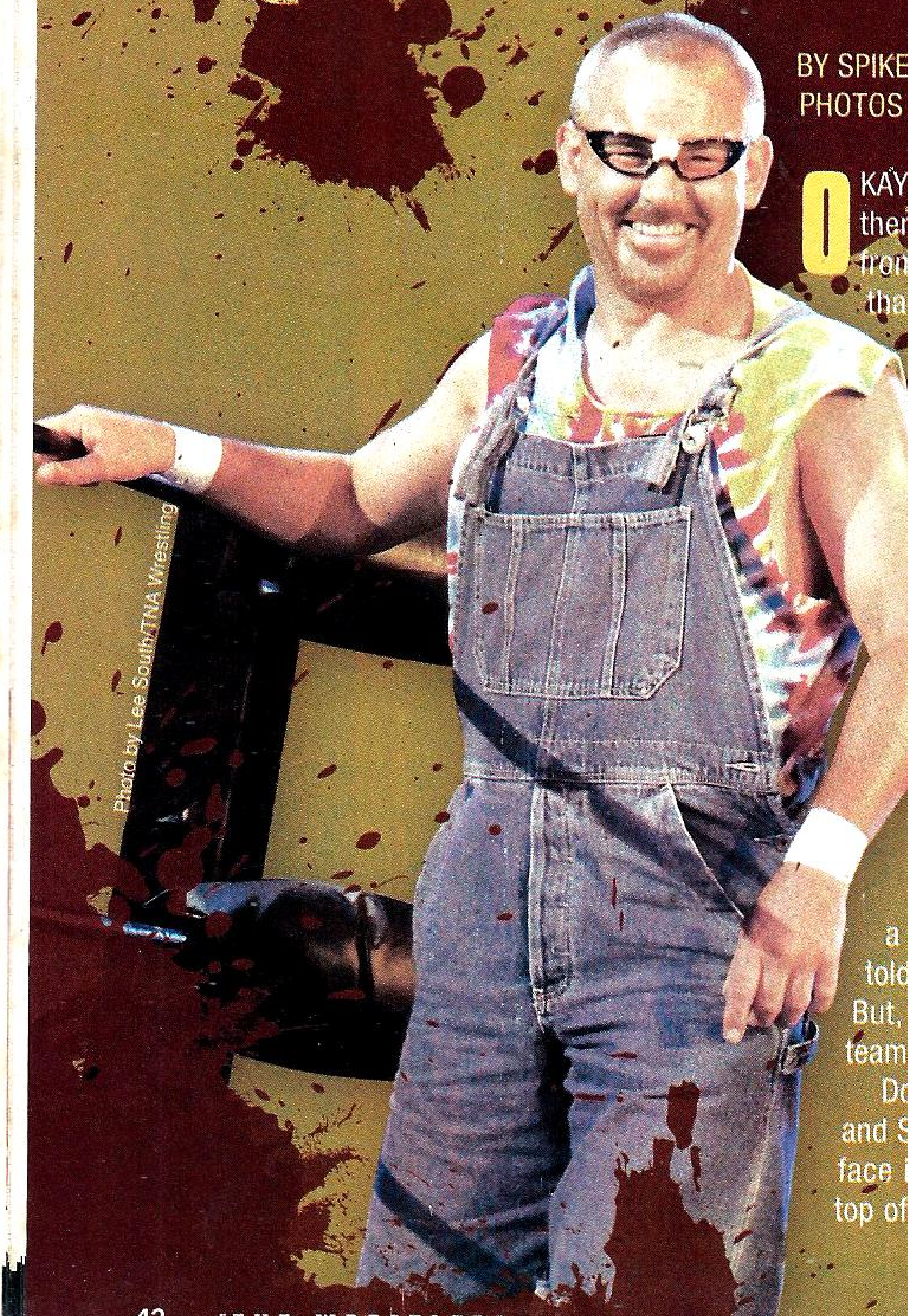


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

OKAY, SO WE'RE not a family in the traditional sense. But I would argue there's something about traveling together and taking your bumps from coast to coast that makes a wrestling family more tightly knit than any family bonded together by blood. I'll take the Andersons over the Osmonds any day.

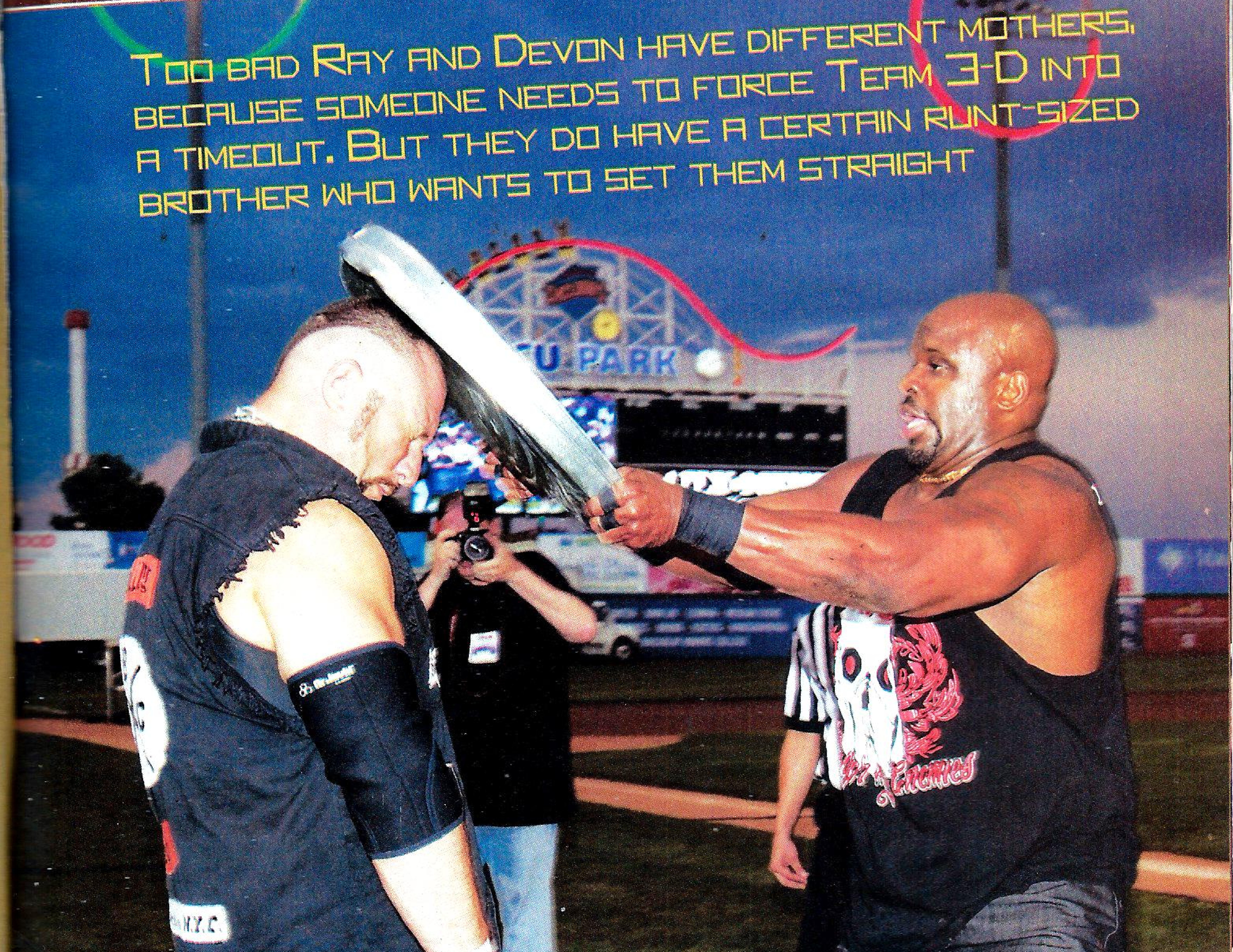
That's why I am so disturbed by the events that have unfolded in TNA over the past several months regarding my brothers. Now, I do hold one of my brothers more responsible than the other, and I'm sure which one will become apparent as you read further. However, I'm not here to assign blame, but merely to preach some sense into my brothers before it's too late.

Fans come up to me all the time and ask the same question: What the heck happened?

This time last year, my brothers Ray and Devon were talking about retirement and going out in style. I think Devon would have preferred to go out quietly, but Ray, who's always had more of a flair for showmanship, wanted something more elaborate.

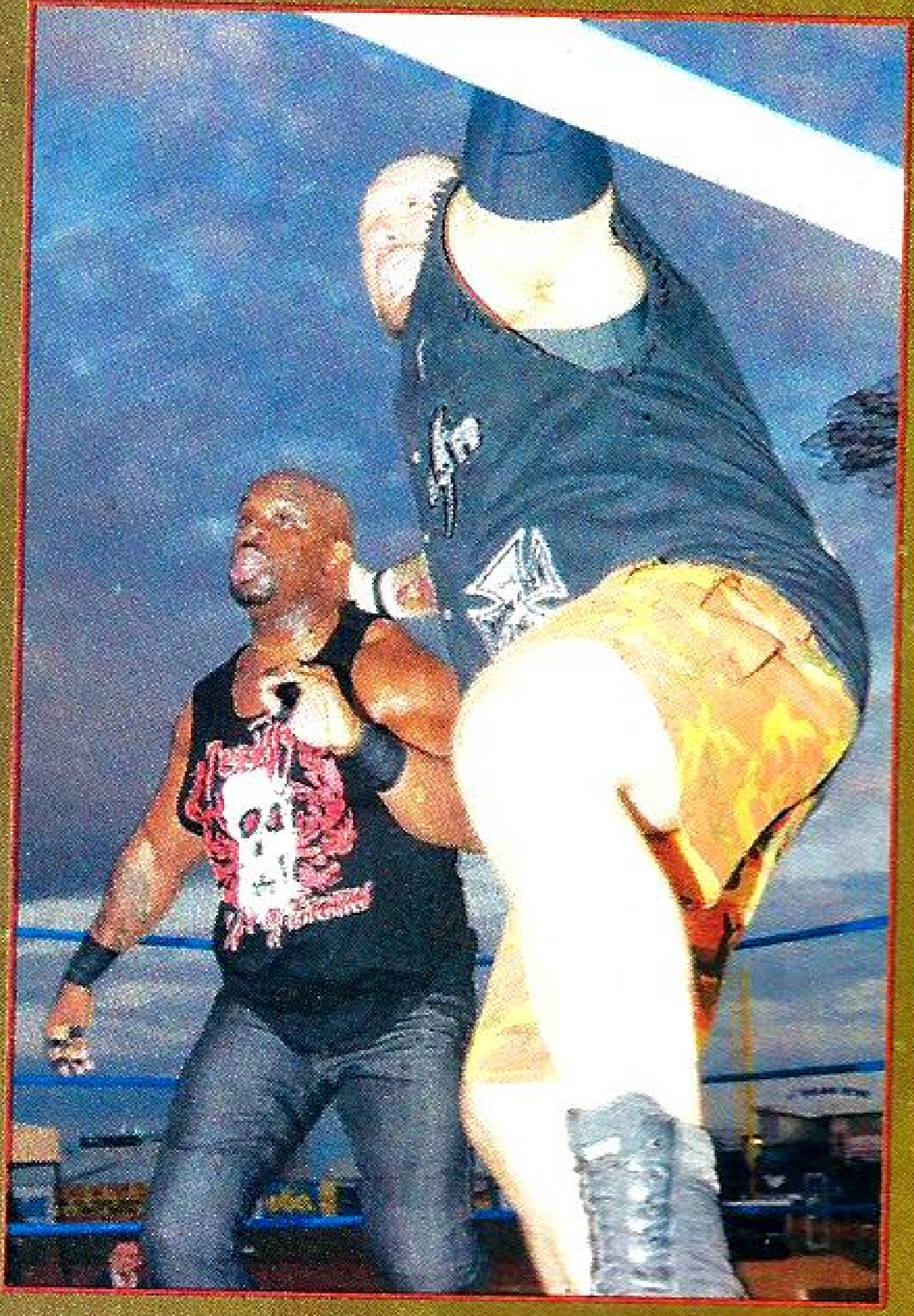
First they made a minor announcement that they'd be making a major announcement at Bound for Glory, where Ray and Devon told the fans they would retire. They should've stopped right there. But, no, Ray wanted one more match—against the TNA World tag team champions The Motor City Machine Guns, no less!

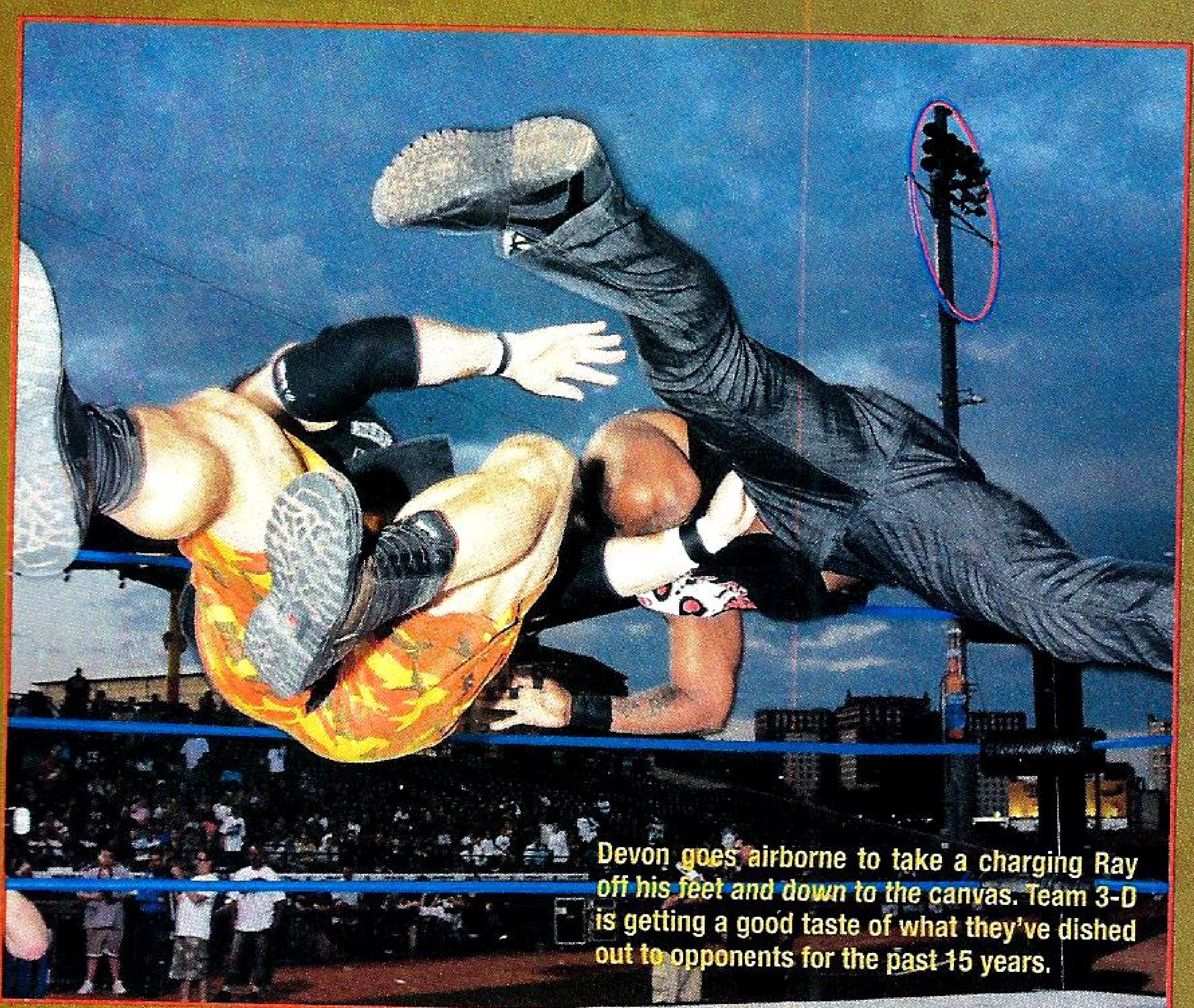
Don't get me wrong: Ray and Devon were capable of beating Sabin and Shelley. Team 3-D can still beat any team, anywhere. But, let's face it, Sabin and Shelley are nearly unstoppable when they're on top of their game. So, yeah, Team 3-D *could* have beaten the Guns,



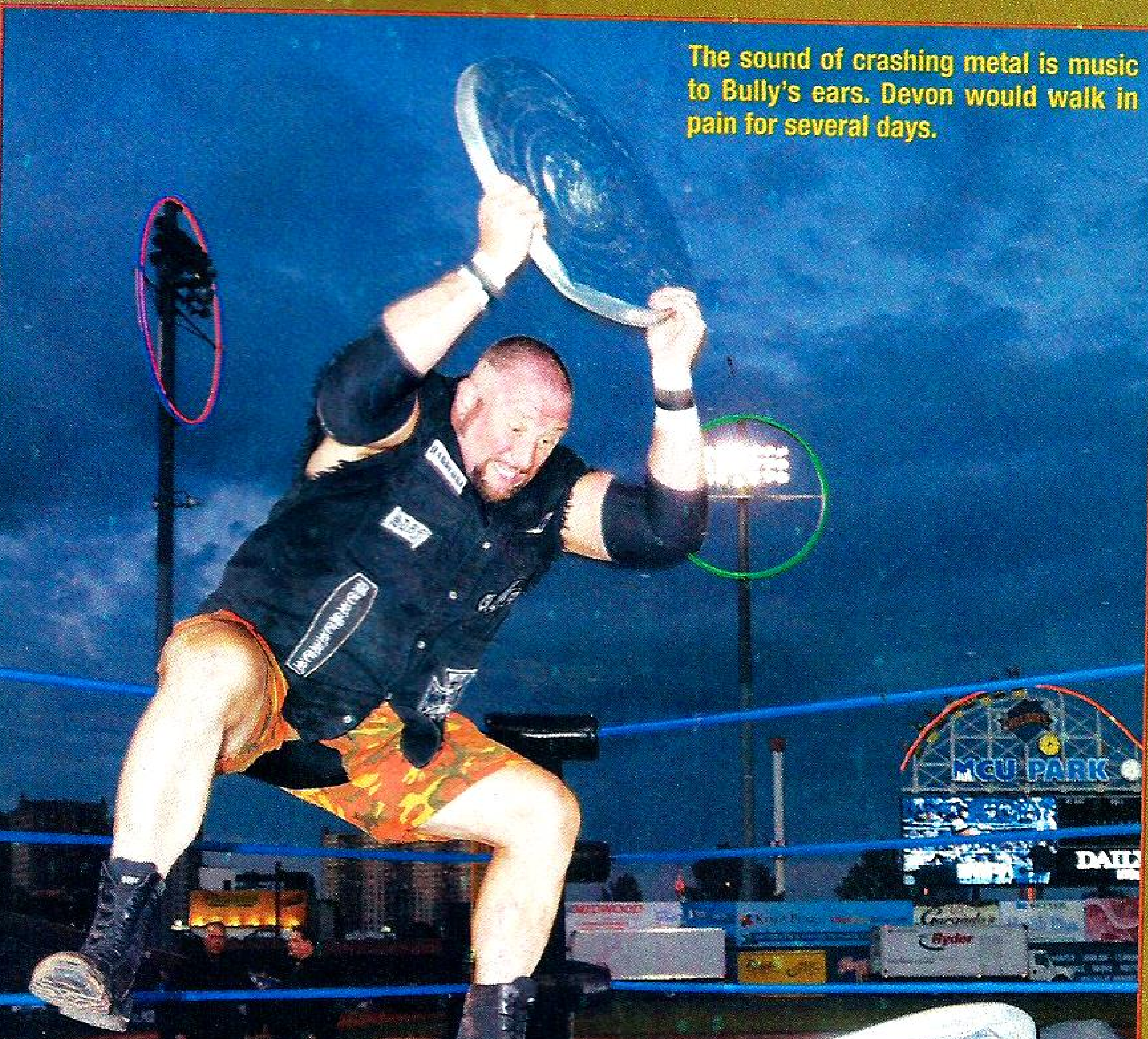
Too bad Ray and Devon have different mothers, because someone needs to force Team 3-D into a timeout. But they do have a certain runt-sized brother who wants to set them straight

Ray presents a souvenir for the ringside fans at Brooklyn's MCU Park. Their little "brother" is greatly upset by what's been going on for the past several months.





Devon goes airborne to take a charging Ray off his feet and down to the canvas. Team 3-D is getting a good taste of what they've dished out to opponents for the past 15 years.



The sound of crashing metal is music to Bully's ears. Devon would walk in pain for several days.

but that was far from a sure thing. Well, we all know what happened. The Guns defeated Team 3-D at Turning Point, and Ray blamed Devon for the loss.

That, in and of itself, is nothing new. No matter where Ray and Devon have gone, three things have remained constant: One, they've won championships. Two, they've had spats. And three, they've reconciled. Regardless of what has come between them, the story has always ended with Ray, Devon, and sometimes Yours Truly, fighting on the same side.

But this time, I am genuinely worried that the split may be permanent, and I'll tell you why.

Ray has the kind of personality that always goes too far. For example, even going back to our earliest days, it was always, *Why let Spike just stand there when I can throw him 15 rows into the crowd? Or, Why just knock down Mae Young, when I can Bubba bomb her through a table from the top rope? This time, Ray must have figured, Why just attack Devon, when I can injure his kids, too?*

It is the ultimate example of Ray going too far, an act of treachery Devon will never forgive. So, with both of them blinded by hatred and pride, it's up to me to try to preserve the family name.

Even if Ray and Devon choose to never team up in the ring again (although I would like to point out that

Photo by Jason Ross Lavin

A feud between these two men is nothing new. Ray and Devon have done it every place they've wrestled, including when they were starting out in ECW in 1996.

from a purely competitive view, that given TNA's relatively uncrowded tag team division, there's no better time for an in-ring reunion), remaining estranged from each other at this point makes no sense at all.

First, with Ray now part of Immortal, he and Devon rarely even meet in the same ring. Sure, there's been an occasional match since their feud peaked months ago, but it would be inaccurate to say they're fighting to prove who the better wrestler is.

Second, and more importantly, Ray and Devon share a legacy both men contributed to heavily and it's one they both deserve to enjoy. However, there is no legacy if Ray and Devon are not on the same side. They've won so many titles together and have gone down so many roads together, that their contributions to the family name cannot and should not be acknowledged individually. Whether they were known as The Dudley Boyz or Team 3-D, *both* Ray and Devon are the cornerstones of the group.

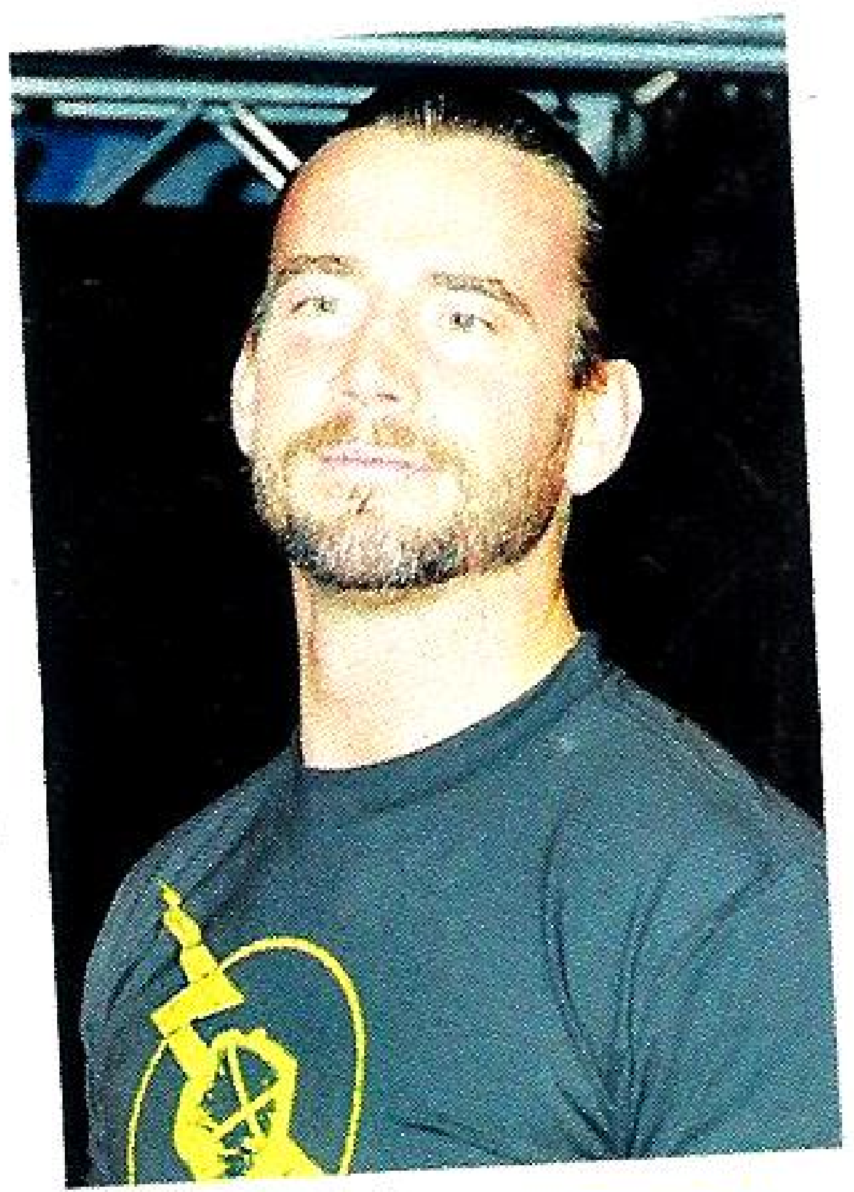
Lastly, Ray without Devon and vice versa just feels unnatural. Can you imagine Rum without Coke or Penn without Teller? I can't, and I can't imagine Ray and Devon not being part of the same unit, or at least being on civil terms. And I'm confident in saying that the legions of fans that have supported them over the years—and continue to support them—feel the same way.

I am cautiously optimistic that this plea will get through to Ray and Devon. One thing that might bring them together again is the fact that they both share in the oversight of the Team 3-D Wrestling Academy training school. Hopefully, one or both of them will realize that in the short- and long-term, they are much better off with each other than without.

Most of all, I hope they realize that they are disgracing—and ultimately threatening to destroy—the family name they've spent so many years establishing.

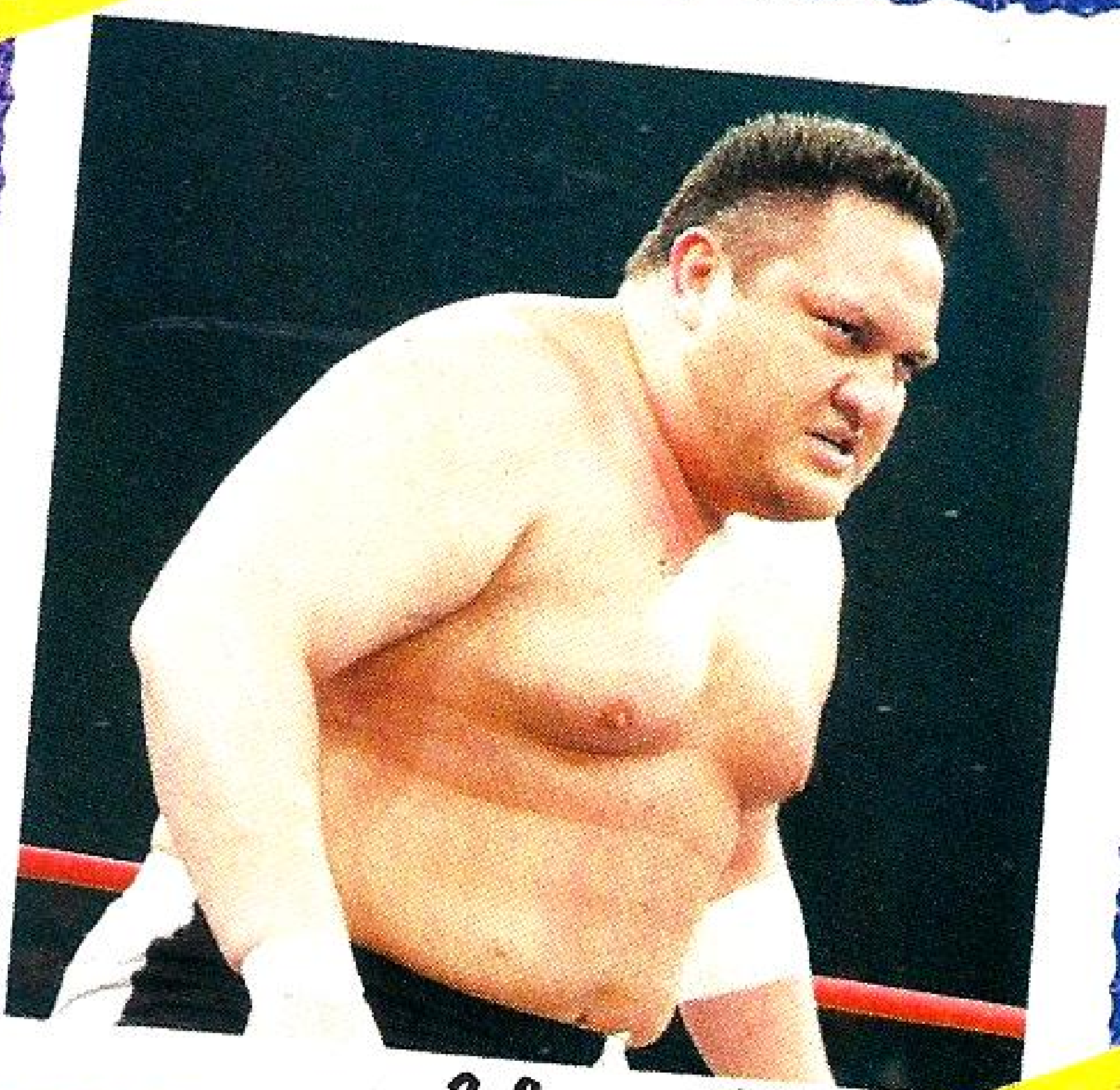
Ray and Devon, I don't expect you guys to ever be as close as you once were, but whatever you do, please don't leave things as they are now. Your differences are your business, but I cannot sit by and just watch the family name crumble. ☐

Whassup with this? Referee Brian Hebner plays the role of Ray as Devon flies off the top with a diving headbutt. Most people think Devon's on the right side of this feud, but should he be getting this type of help from an official?



1. CM Punk

Photo by George Napolitano



2. Samoa Joe

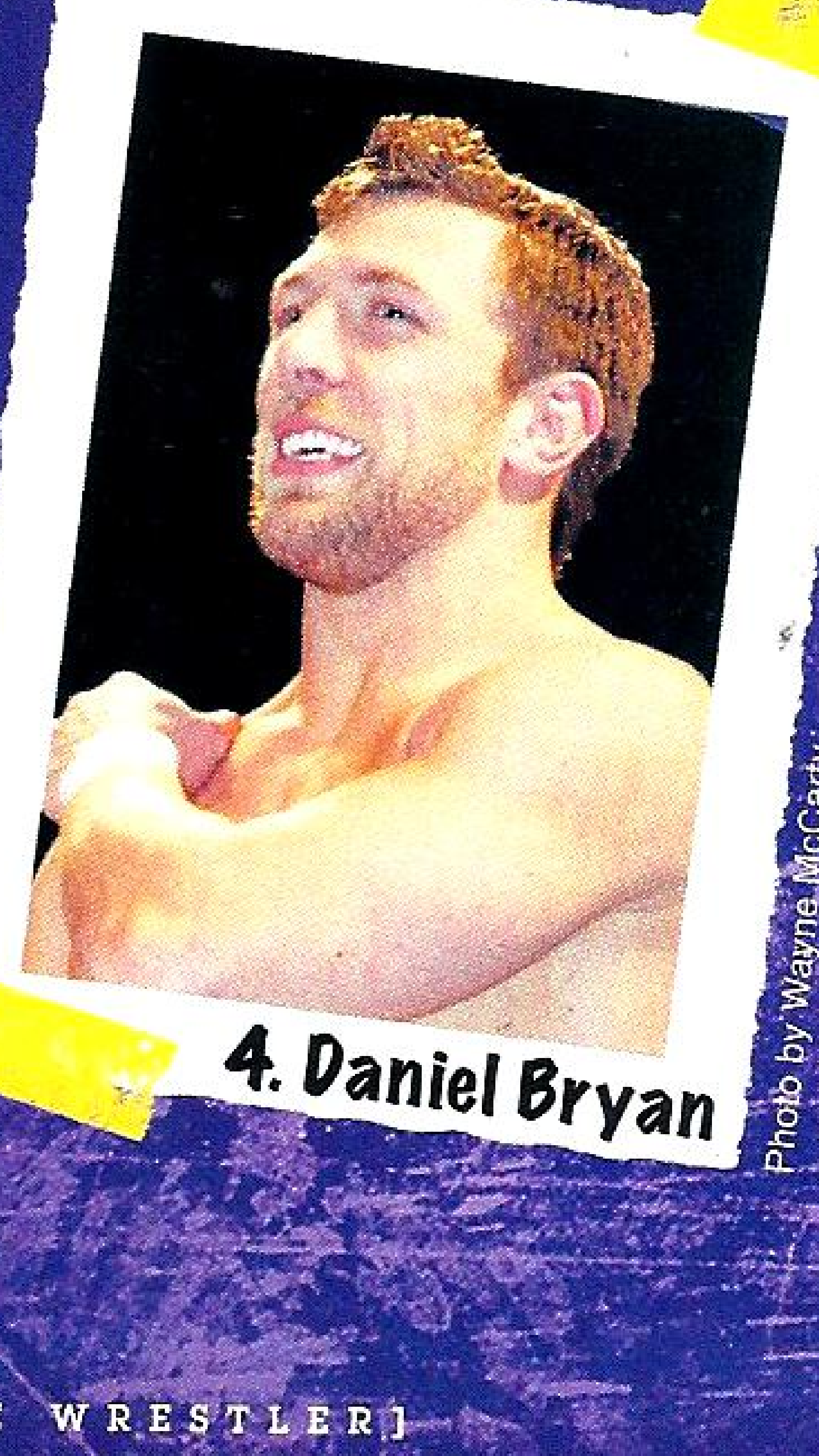
Photo by Lee South/ TNA Wrestling

3. Chavo Guerrero Jr.

Photo by George Napolitano

MIND IF WE SPEND YOUR MONEY, SINCLAIR?

THESE ARE 10 WRESTLERS ROH MUST SIGN!



4. Daniel Bryan

Photo by Wayne McCarty

5. The Motor City Machine Guns

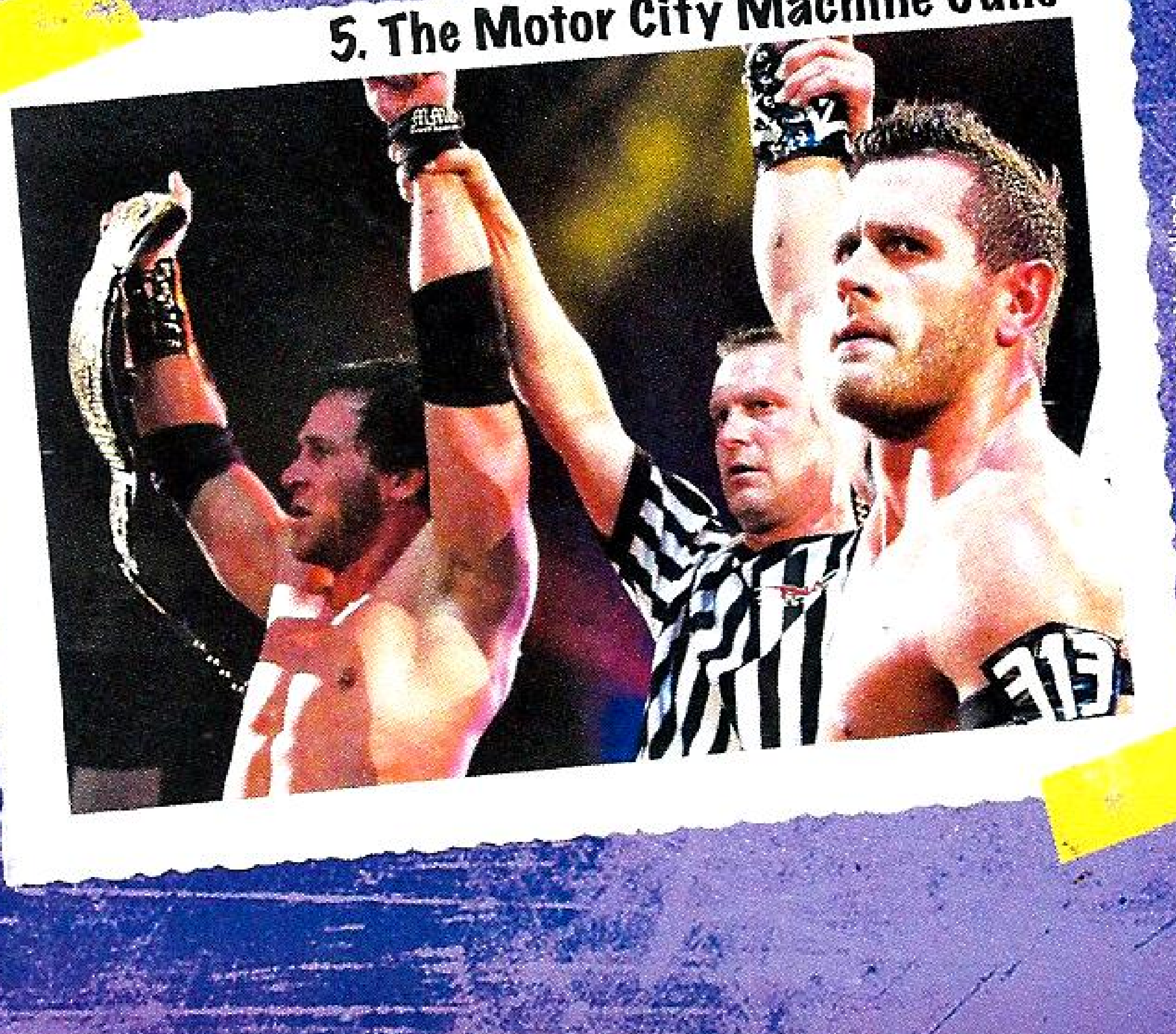


Photo by Lee South/ TNA Wrestling

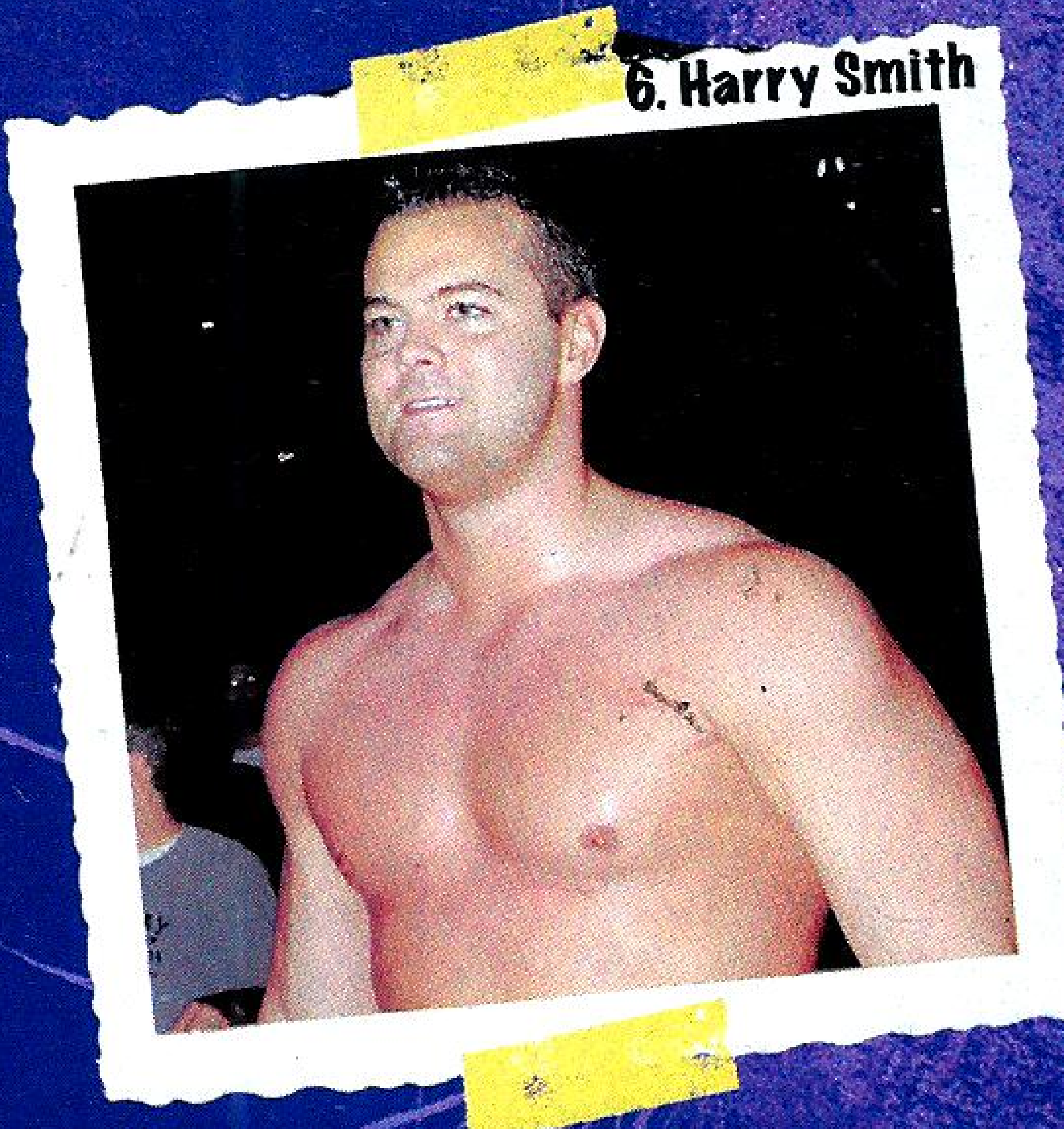

6. Harry Smith

Photo by George Napolitano

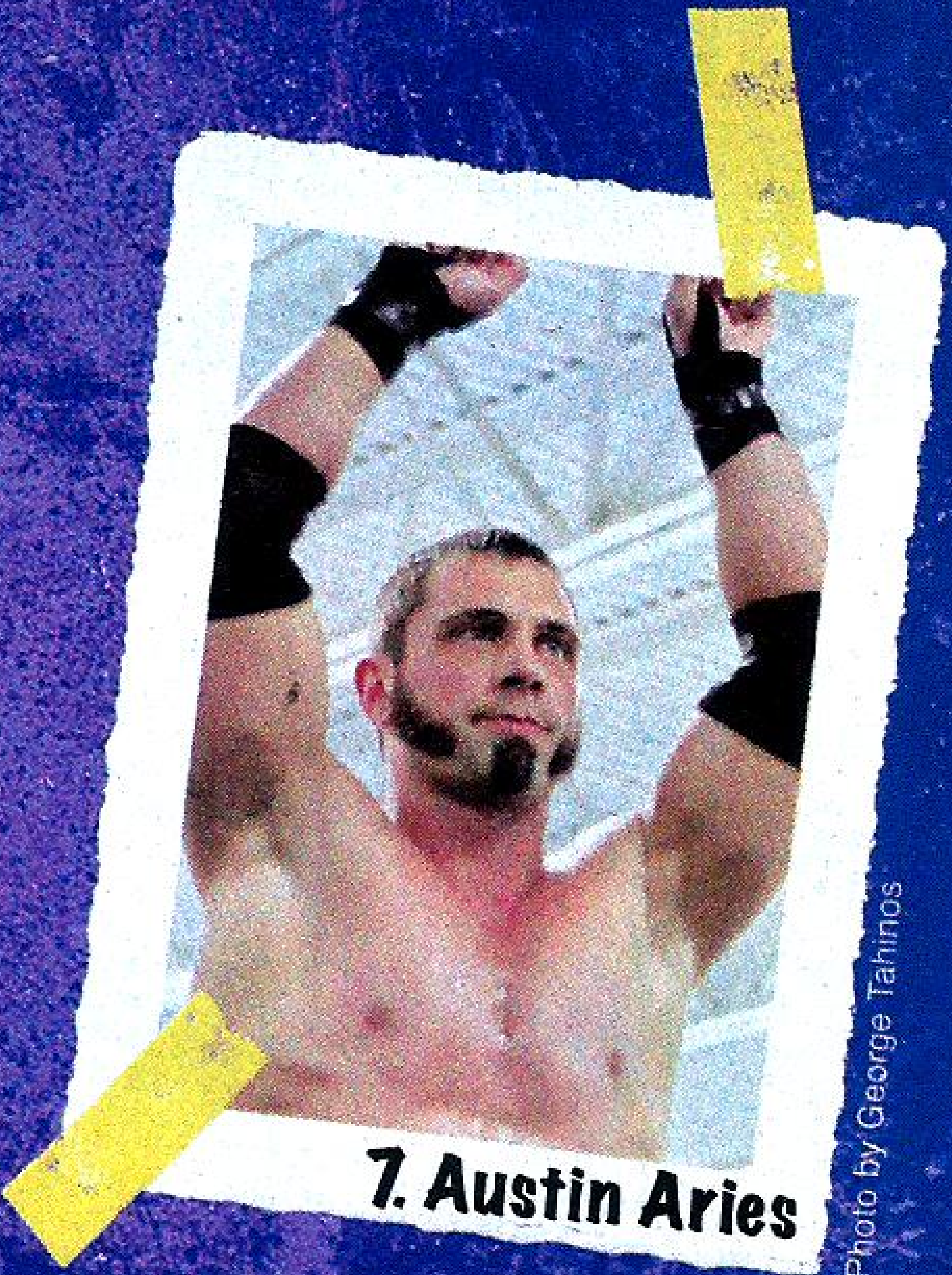

7. Austin Aries

Photo by George Tahinos

Thanks to Sinclair Broadcasting Group's financial backing, Ring of Honor can now do what other national promotions have done for decades: go on a shopping spree

BY AL CASTLE

WITH MORE FANS than ever before exposed to Ring of Honor through its new, nationally televised show, it's important that the company put its best foot forward in presenting a top-notch roster.

For ROH and its new owner Sinclair Broadcasting Group, that doesn't necessarily mean breaking the bank to bring in big-name stars. Rather, it means going after the type of wrestler that best fits ROH's vision, whether they're free agents, past ROH wrestlers, or even those under contract right now to TNA or WWE (after their deals expire, of course).

We are not saying that, as currently constituted, the ROH roster is less than top-notch. Far from it. But we are saying that every wrestling promotion—from the tiniest indy group to WWE—should always be looking to add top talent whenever possible, and now that ROH is in a position to pursue some wrestlers it may have been unable to target in the past, the decision-makers should be thinking about who to add to its roster.

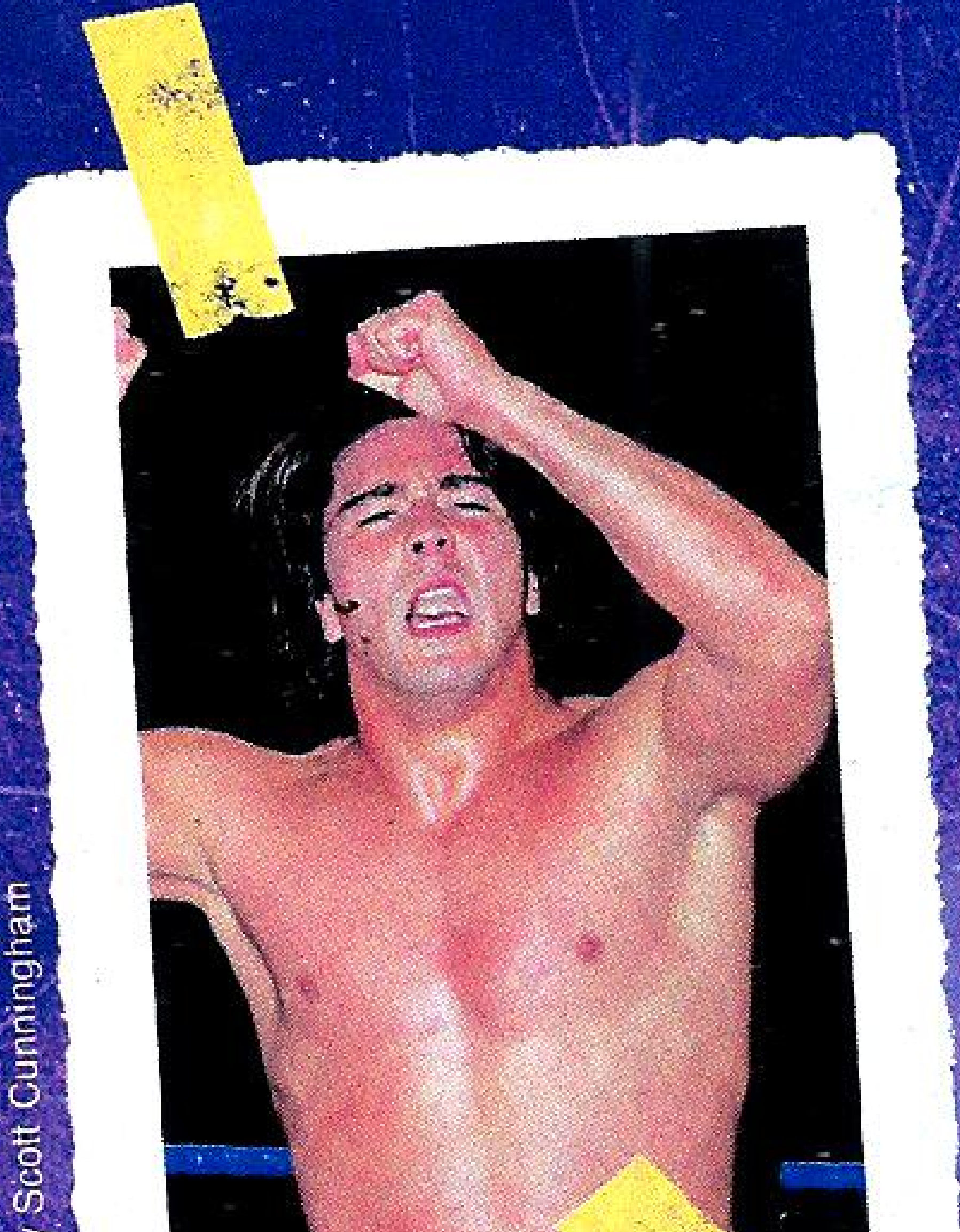

8. Paul London

Photo by Scott Cunningham

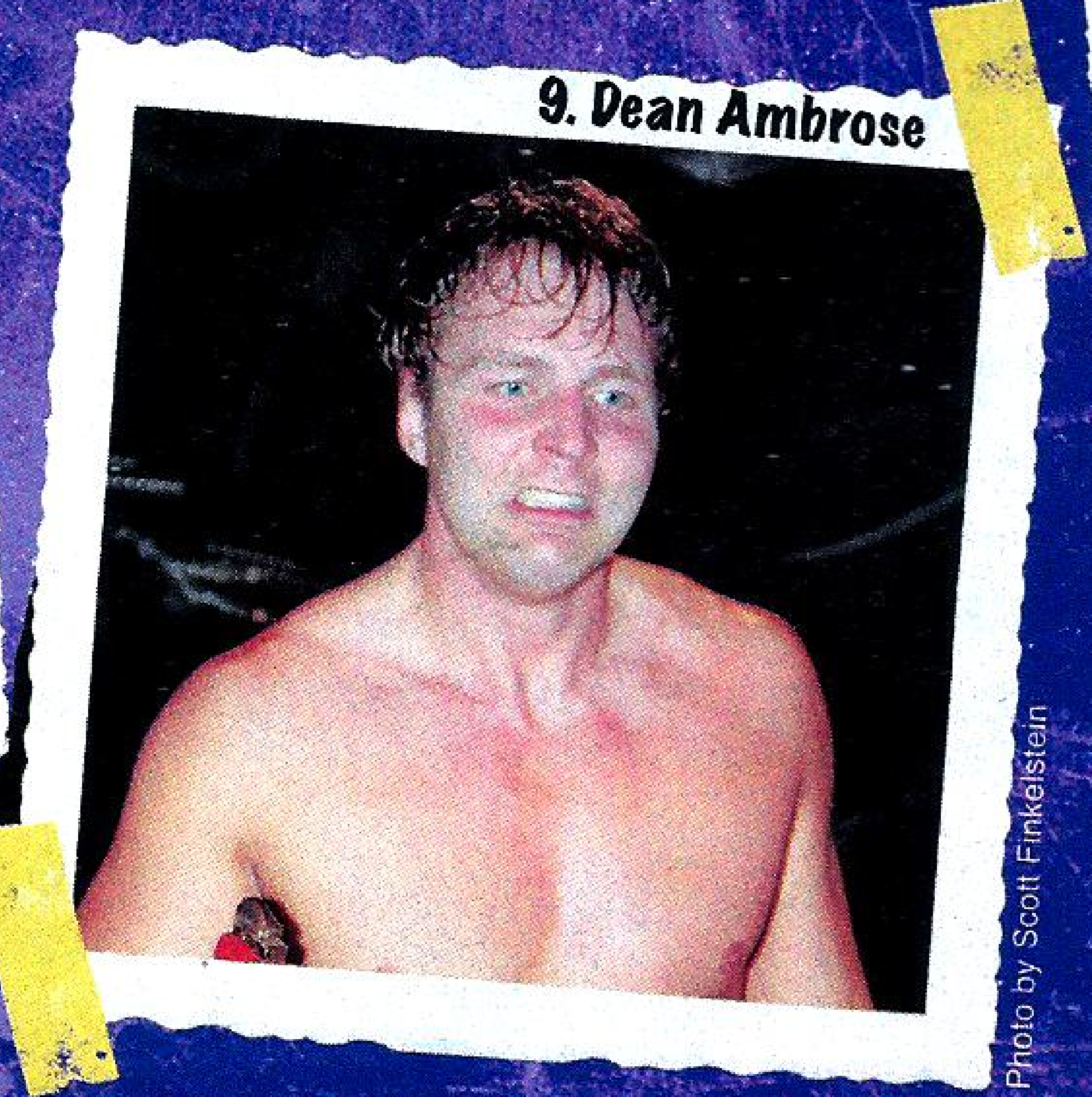

9. Dean Ambrose

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

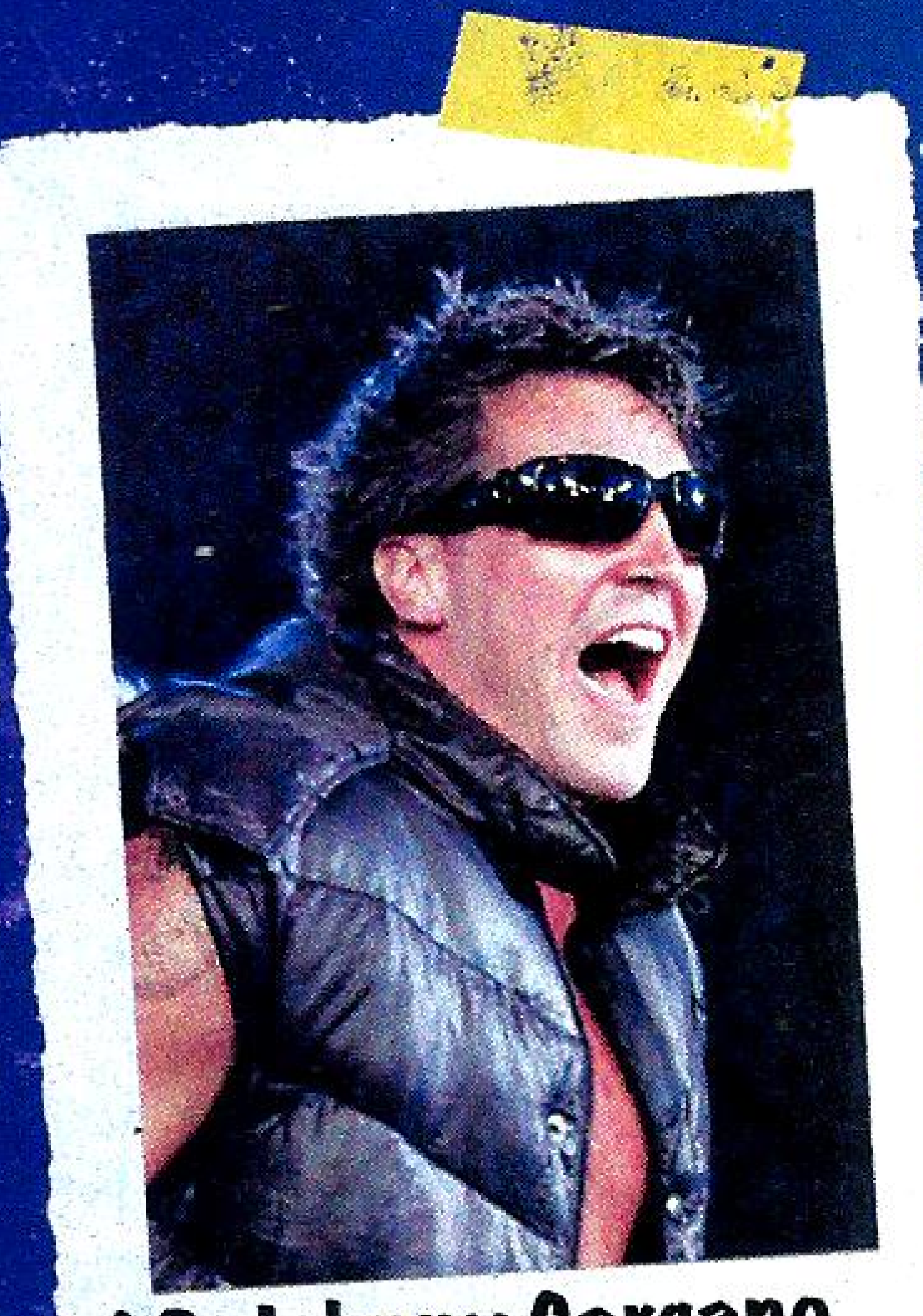

10. Johnny Gargano

Photo by Lee South/ TNA Wrestling

Photo by Wayne McCarty

As Brian Danielson in ROH, Daniel Bryan (stretching Ted DiBiase Jr.) was given lots of time to showcase his vast technical skills. He doesn't get nearly as much time in WWE. If Bryan stays mired in WWE's mid-card for too long, an ROH return might start looking good to him.

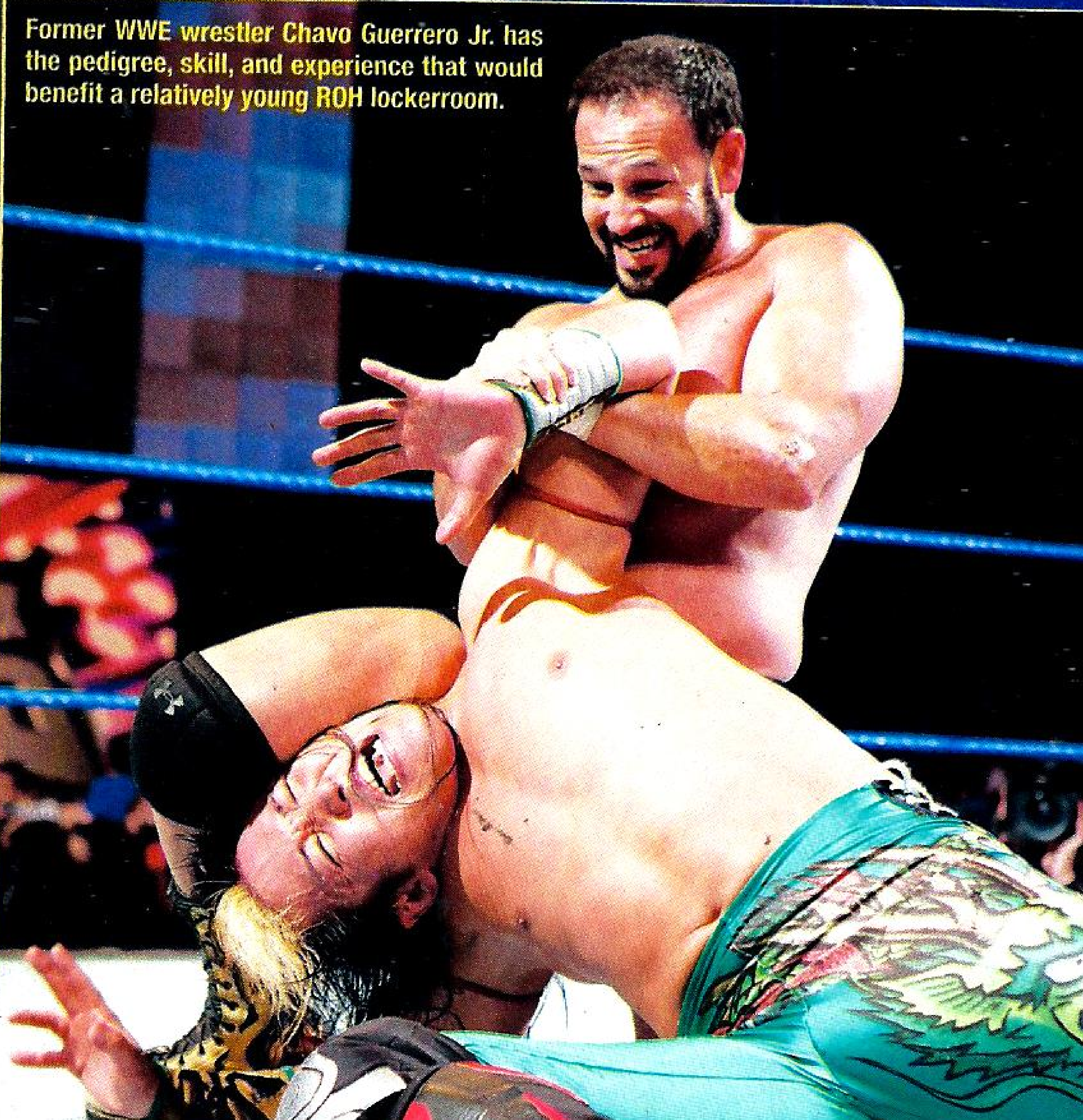
Here are 10 wrestlers who should be on Ring of Honor's shopping list:

CM Punk: It's ambitious—maybe even unrealistic—but new Ring of Honor COO Joe Koff should at least pick up the phone and find out what it might take to bring in Punk. Apparently, Punk still has some affection for ROH, as suggested by his mention of the company during a live *Raw* broadcast. He retains friendships with several ROH employees, and even shows up at an occasional ROH event. Given his star power, Punk may be the one high-priced talent Sinclair considers breaking the bank for. The resulting business generated by having Punk as the poster boy for the new ROH could offset the financial outlay needed to sign him. The "pipe bomb" could be a "pipe dream" for Sinclair, but why not aim high and see where it takes you?

Samoa Joe: Joe was once the most dominant force in wrestling, holding the ROH title for a record 645 days and making it all the way to number four in the 2006 "*PWI* 500," based largely on his ROH work. But in recent years, he has mostly floundered in TNA's mid-card. It may take a bit of rebuilding for Joe to regain his reputation as one of the sport's toughest butt-kickers, but ROH fans know he's better than how he's been portrayed of late, and would love for him to have the opportunity to prove it in his former home promotion.

Chavo Guerrero Jr.: ROH doesn't want a reputation for being the kind of company that goes after every ex-WWE wrestler. But Chavo Guerrero Jr. isn't just any ex-WWE wrestler. He's a 17-year ring veteran who performed on a national stage for 15 of those years, a tremendously gifted athlete, and, most importantly,

Former WWE wrestler Chavo Guerrero Jr. has the pedigree, skill, and experience that would benefit a relatively young ROH lockerroom.



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a Guerrero. And, at 40 years old, he still has some quality years ahead of him. WWE's pigeonholing of Guerrero as a lower-card comedy act should not take away from the fact that he is a world-class wrestler with the kind of experience and wisdom that could be invaluable to a young lockerroom.

Photo by George Napolitano

Unlike in WWE, Harry Smith's quiet disposition would not hurt his chances of success in ROH, where what wrestlers do in the ring tends to count for more than what they do on the mike.

Daniel Bryan: Unlike Punk, signing Bryan may not be nearly as far-fetched. After all, it was in ROH that Bryan Danielson earned his reputation as, arguably, the best wrestler in the world. He's certainly making more money in WWE, but it's possible that Bryan, who was used to competing in epic, hour-long bouts against world-class wrestlers, may be feeling less fulfilled wrestling five-minute matches in WWE. If he cashes in his Money in the Bank title shot at WM 28, all bets are off. But if he goes back to languishing in WWE's mid-card, Bryan may want to consider his options. We can already hear the "Welcome back!" chants.

The Motor City Machine Guns: The team of Alex Shelley and Chris Sabin would fit ROH like a black, elbow-length glove. Not only did Shelley and Sabin compete in ROH early in their careers, but they've received heroes' welcomes from ROH fans when they've returned to the company for special, non-televised matches in recent years. With TNA's tag team division thinning out in recent months, The MCMGs may be looking for a change of scenery and new opponents. Adding them would establish ROH as the undisputed place to go for elite tag team wrestling.

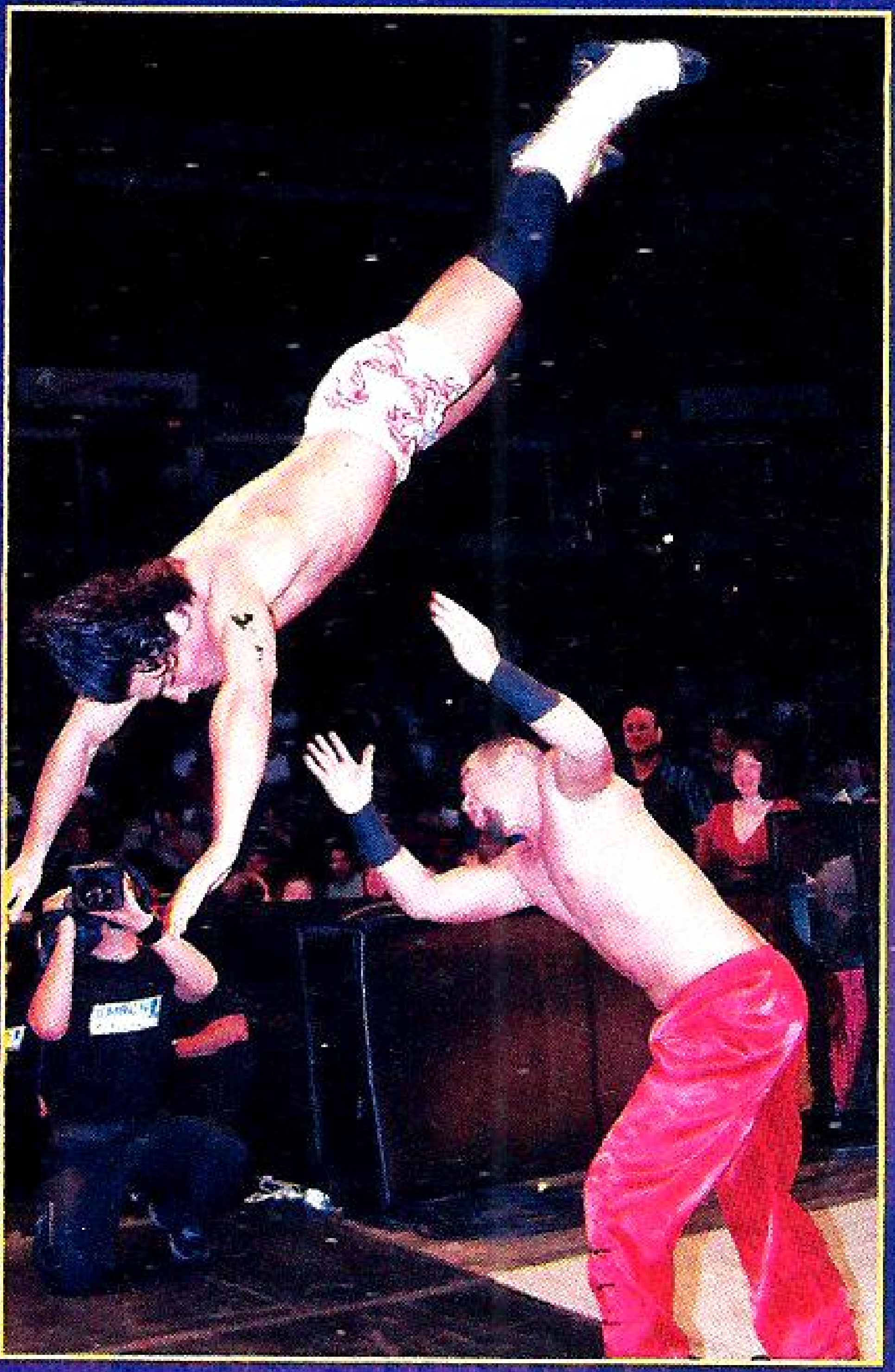


Photo by George Napolitano

Former WWE World tag team champ Paul London can deliver action in the air or on the mat, and would give ROH significant depth in both singles and tag team action.

Harry Smith: Like Guerrero, Smith has more to offer in the ring than his WWE run would suggest. The third-generation competitor was long heralded as a blue-chip prospect, praised by many as one of the most naturally gifted athletes to come out of the famed Hart wrestling family. But he lacked the larger-than-life charisma that WWE looks for in its wrestlers, and was cut in August. In ROH, Smith would be allowed do what he does best—wrestle.

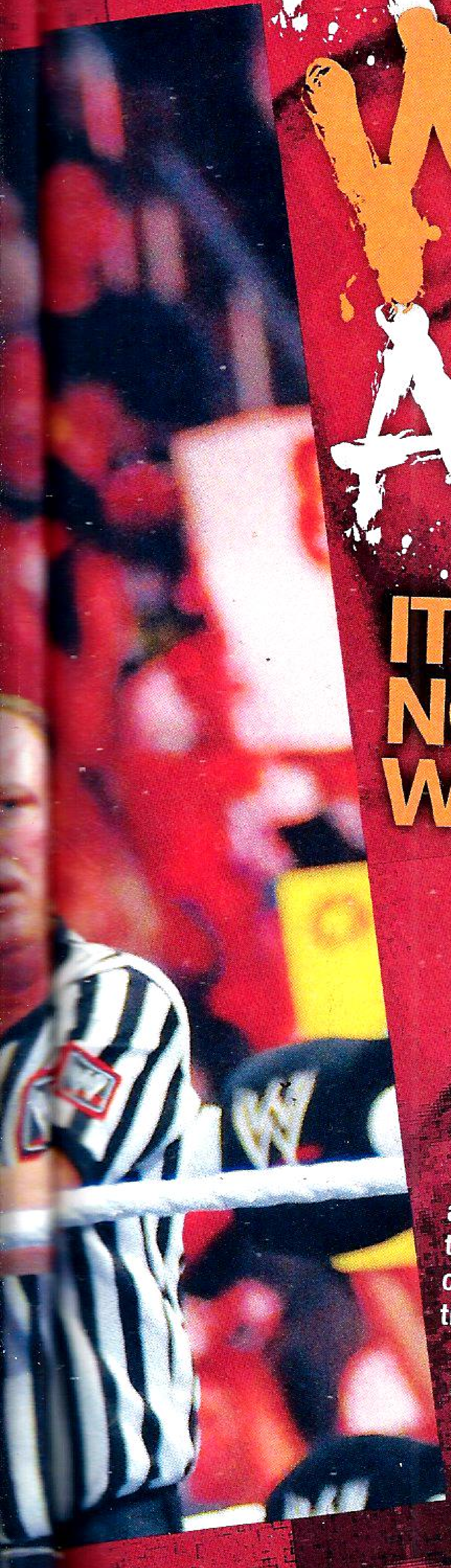
Austin Aries: The only two-time heavyweight champion in ROH history, "A-Double" was let go last year in a cost-cutting measure. ROH's new owners could easily afford to rehire Aries, but he's since taken a job with TNA. Nevertheless, ROH should explore the feasibility of bringing him back. Aries would bring a ton of history and experience in ROH, as well as a number of ready-made main-event matches.

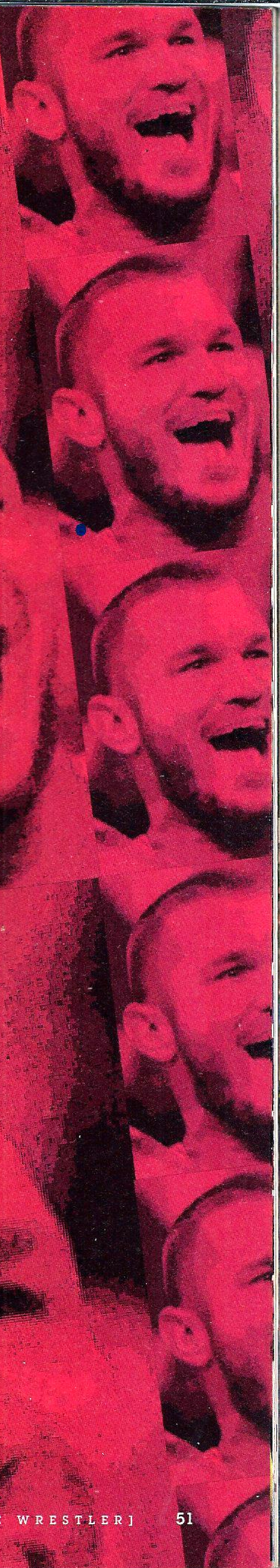
Paul London: London is an ROH alum, and has also spent time in WWE, where he and Brian Kendrick became the longest-reigning World tag team champions in that title's history. Well-rounded and skilled in a variety of styles, London has been bouncing around the U.S. indy circuit and wrestling in Australia. Accomplished and exciting, London is still only 31 and could add significant depth to ROH's singles and tag team ranks.

Dean Ambrose: Before signing a WWE developmental contract, the former Jon Moxley carved out a reputation as one of the most versatile wrestlers on the indy scene. He can brawl, as he did in Combat Zone Wrestling, and he can hang with most ring technicians, as he did in EVOLVE and Dragon Gate USA. He's biding his time in Florida Championship Wrestling, waiting for that call to come from WWE. But if it doesn't, an overhauled ROH would be a terrific Plan B.

Johnny Gargano: Since being purchased by a multimillion-dollar, publicly traded media company, ROH is now, officially, no longer an "independent" promotion. That means, just as other major companies have done for years, ROH should be looking to recruit the best talent from the indies to flesh out its roster. Gargano, a Cleveland, Ohio, native, has risen to the top of EVOLVE and has worked some dark matches for TNA. Gargano is young, exciting, and still "undiscovered" by a national audience. In other words, he's exactly what ROH should be looking for. ☐

MENTAL BREAKDOWNS AND RAGE HAVE HAUNTED **RANDY ORTON** THROUGHOUT HIS CAREER, BUT AT SUMMERSLAM, IT WAS **CHRISTIAN** WHO CAME UNGLUED. "CAPTAIN CHARISMA" NEEDS TO HEED EDGE'S ADVICE IF HE WANTS TO REGAIN THE TITLE





ANGER? WHAT ANGER?

IT WAS CHRISTIAN, NOT ORTON, WHO LOST HIS EDGE

BY DAN MURPHY
PHOTOS BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

IN CHRISTIAN'S DEFENSE, it looked like the World champion had a brilliant plan heading into SummerSlam.

Yes, Christian was putting his championship on the line against Randy Orton, a man known just as much for his sadism and explosive temper as the eight world championships he had acquired over the past seven years.

Their bout was scheduled to be a no-holds-barred match, an anything-goes donnybrook that would play directly into Orton's strengths, where an eruption of anger can end with tables, chairs, and a variety of other weapons slamming into Christian's head.

But "Captain Charisma" had a wild card that gave him a mental and physical edge … or so he thought.

Tradition dictates that the challenger always makes his way to the ring before the champion does, but a confident Christian eschewed that tradition and strode to the ring to

make a special announcement. Grinning from ear to ear, Christian announced that his best friend, Edge, would second him for the match.

As the "Rated R Superstar" hugged his childhood friend, it was clear that Christian, indeed, had an equalizer on his side. "Knowing that his best friend was going to be in his corner, Christian is feeling very, very good about tonight," color commentator Jerry Lawler said. But as the poet Robert Burns sagely noted, "The best laid schemes of mice and men go oft awry."

After thanking the fans for their ovation and mentioning how good he felt to be back in the ring after injuries forced him into retirement, Edge gave Christian a lesson in tough love.

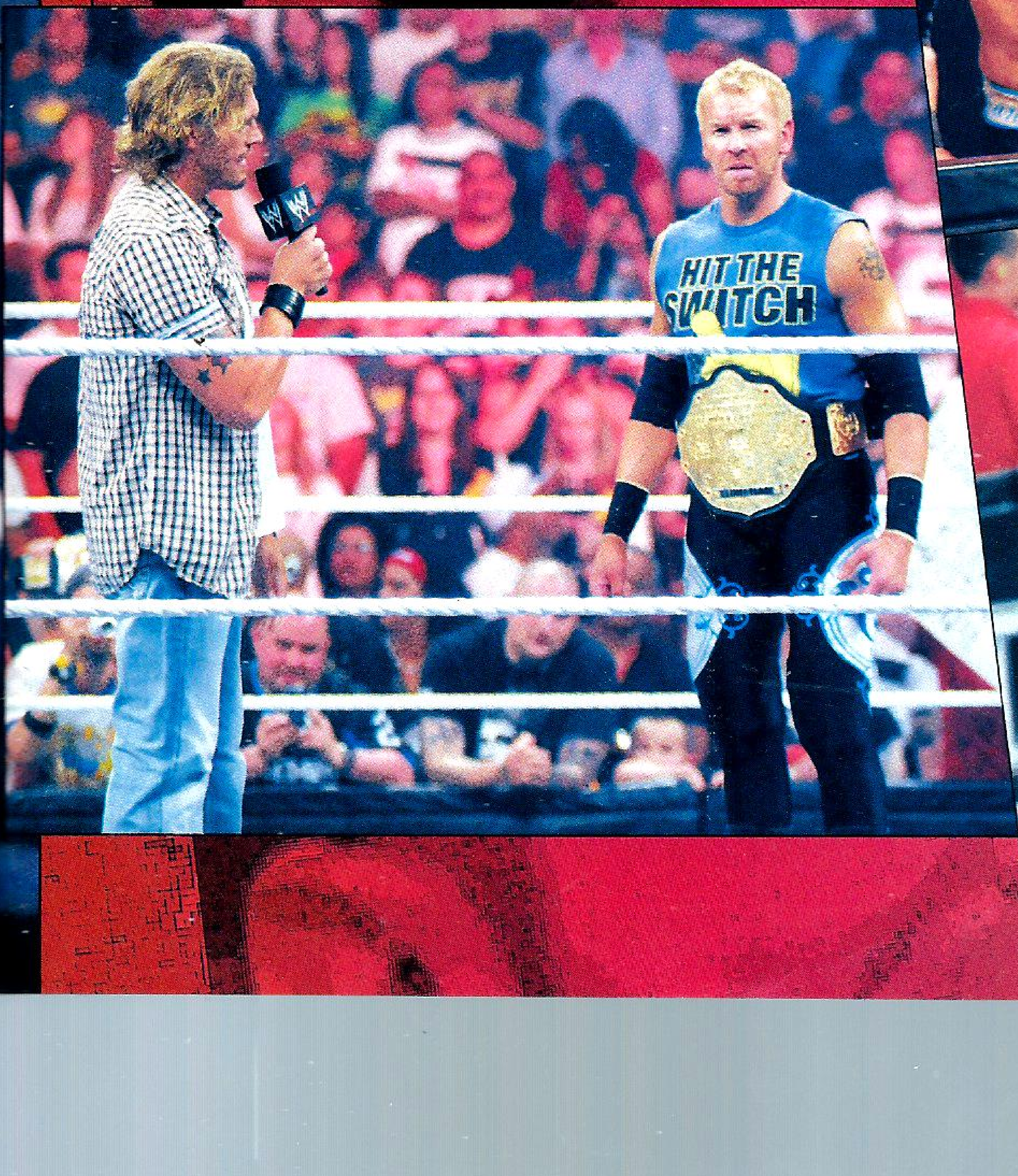
After pointing out that his retirement gave Christian a chance to reach for—and grab—a WWE world title, Edge said Christian was a worthy champion. But after losing the title just days after winning it, Edge said Christian had changed. He said Christian had become a whiner, and that winning a championship by disqualification and hiding behind contractual loopholes was both dishonorable and boring.

"Somewhere along the line, Christian, you became a disgrace to yourself," Edge said. "You need to hear this from me, because you're not going to listen to it from anybody else. I didn't know my best friend would become a whining, crying, moaning little bitch."

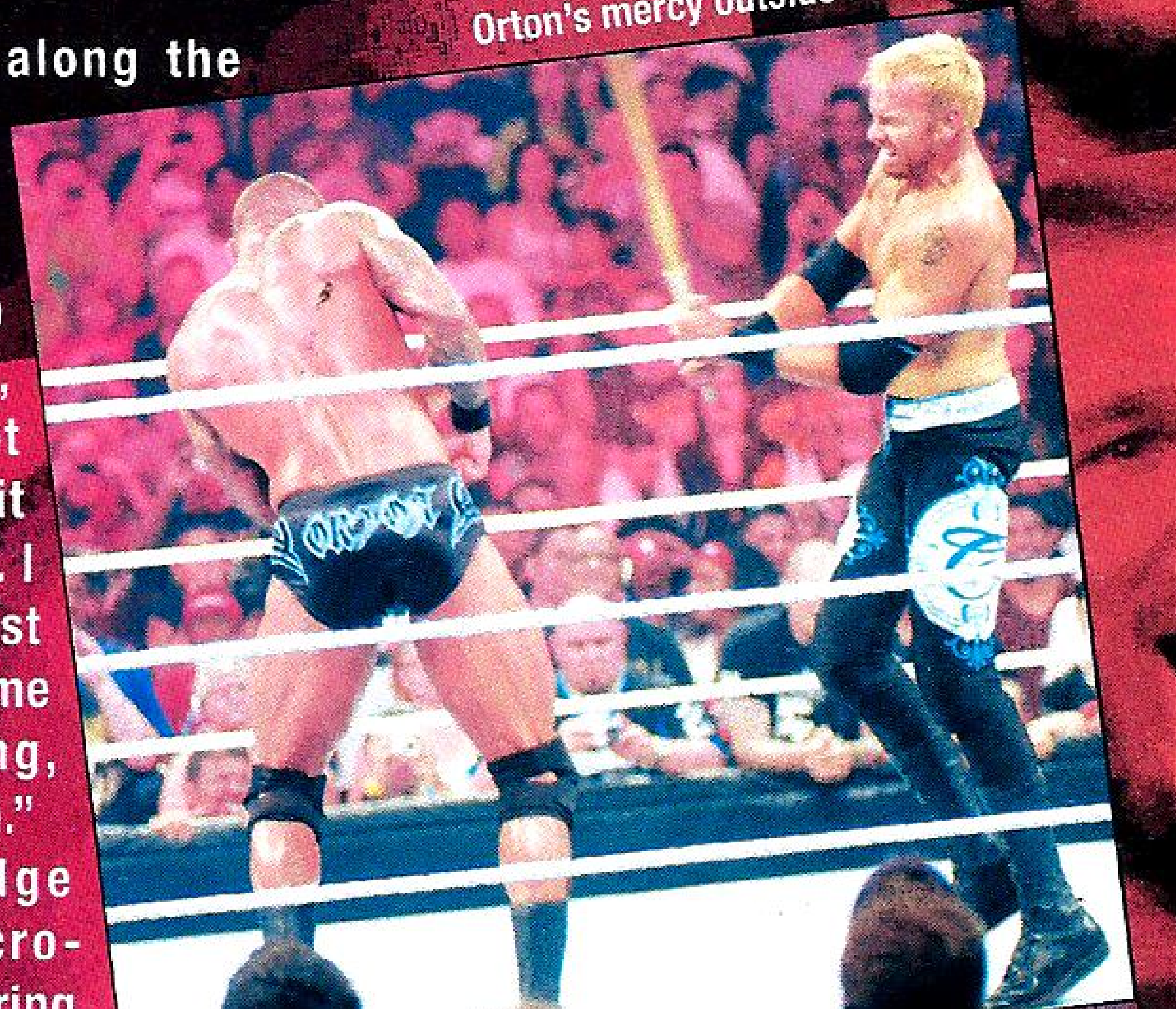
With that, Edge dropped the microphone and left the ring, leaving Christian impotently yelling, "Where are you going? Come back here!"

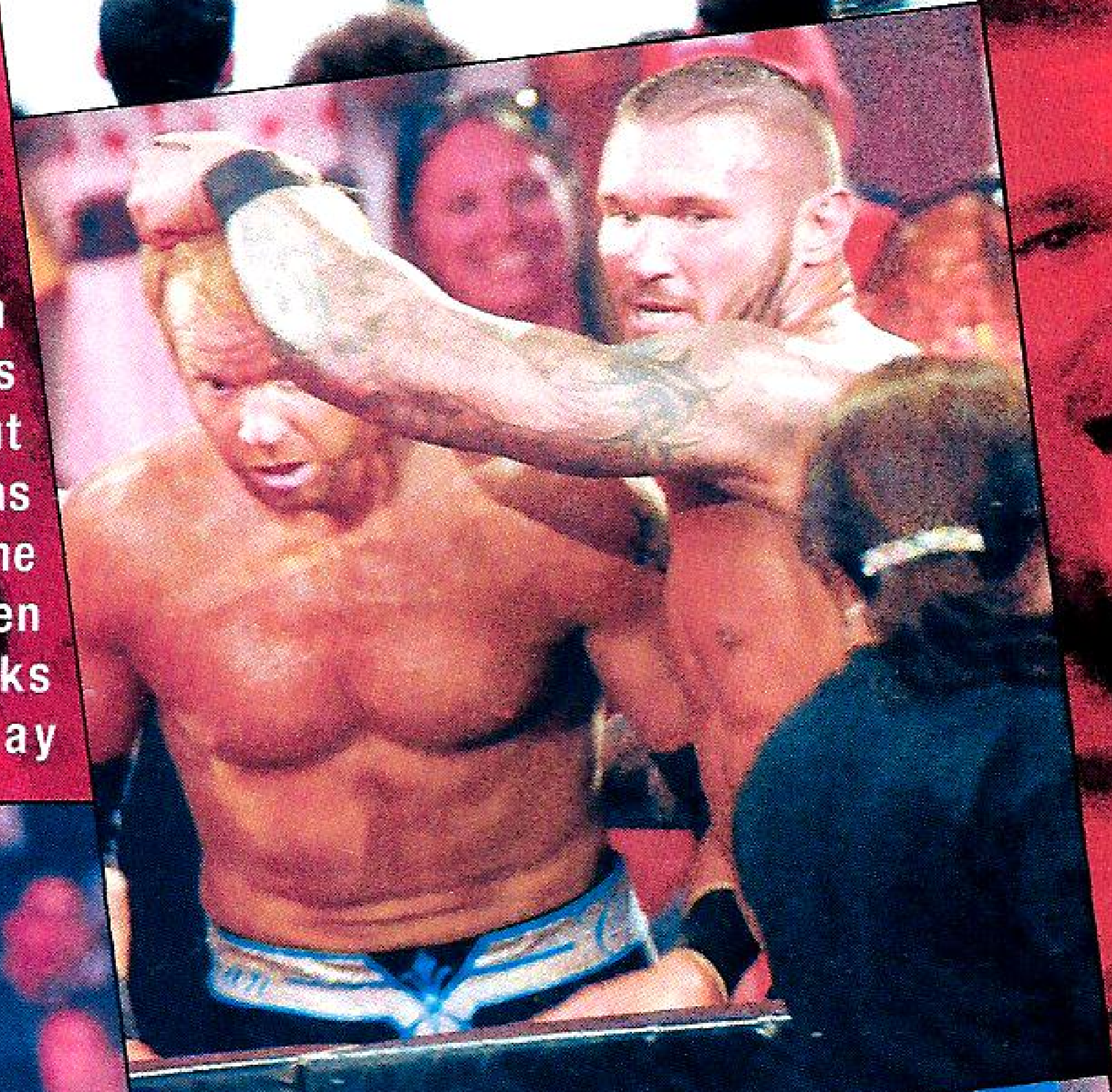
It may have taken Orton nearly 24 minutes to pin the champion, but the fact of the matter was that Christian had lost the match before it had even begun. Edge's remarks completely took away

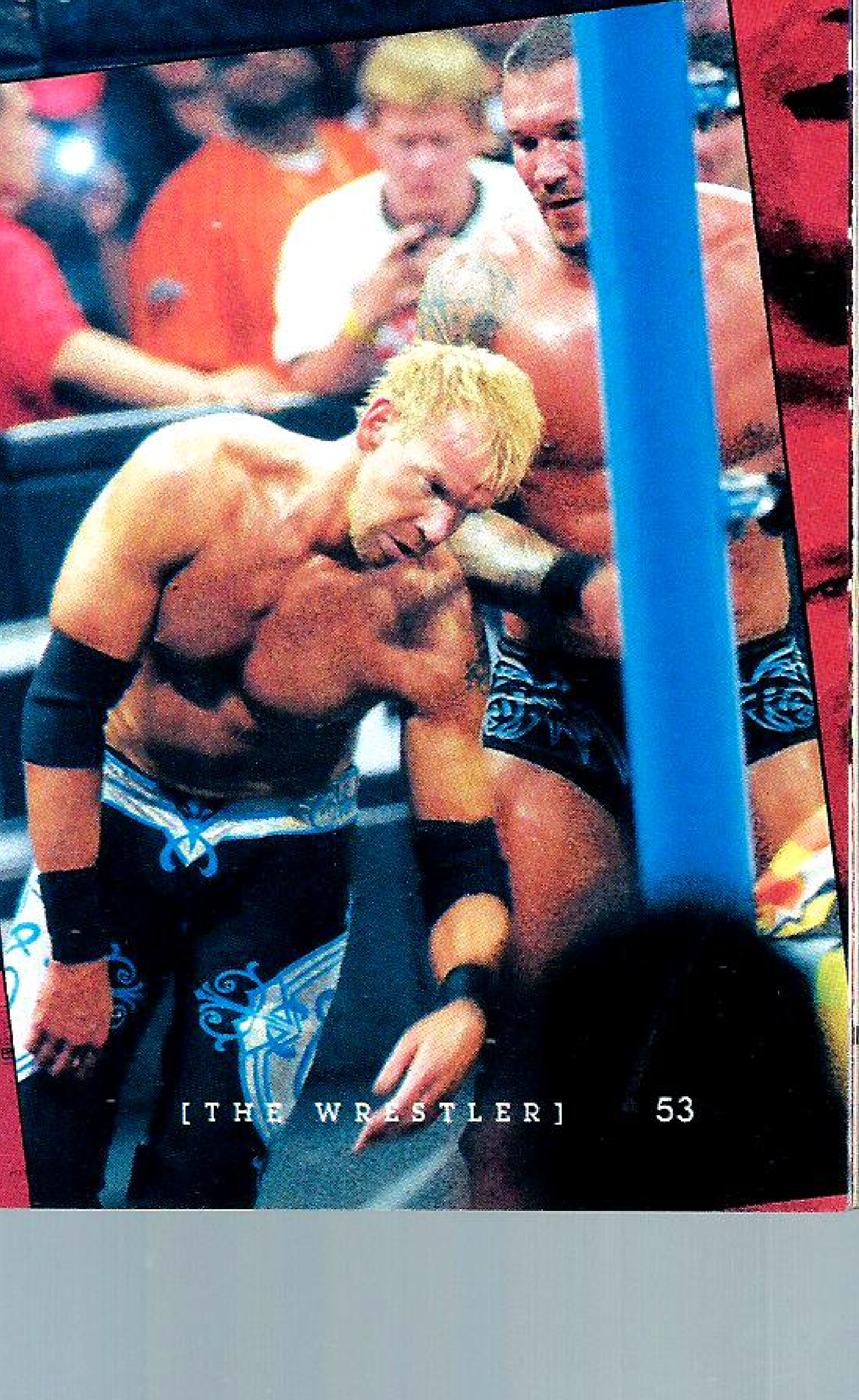
Christian and Edge share a warm moment at Los Angeles' Staples Center just before Christian's World title defense against Randy Orton (opposite page). Things began to get very chilly very quickly when Edge told his best friend what he thought of his recent demeanor (below).



Top to bottom: Christian is fairly expert with a kendo stick, but his focus was gone from the start and he soon found himself without the weapon and at Orton's mercy outside the ring.







Christian's focus, and he never got it back. Christian managed to wrestle a competitive match, but he was in desperation mode throughout, fighting purely on instinct and adrenaline because his entire match strategy had blown up in his face.

Christian's body language was unmistakable. He was confused. He was angry. He was scared.

He had lost his Edge.

Surprisingly, Orton kept himself on an even keel and wrestled a smart tactical match. For all the talk of Orton's rage—and his supposed affliction with intermittent explosive disorder—Orton managed to keep his emotions in check and his eyes on the prize.

Though Christian was clearly flustered, he did string together some nifty sequences that saw him escape, block, and even counter several RKO attempts. Ordinarily, Orton would have let such maneuvers drive him to the point of distraction, but not this time.

Even when Christian spat in his face, Orton remained relatively composed. When his thumb was ripped open, Orton saw his own blood, but he didn't see red. In fact, he ultimately won the match—and his ninth world championship—with an impeccably timed RKO, catching Christian in mid-air and dropping him face-first on the ring steps.

Orton's temper cost him the World championship at Money in the Bank. By controlling his temper and channeling his frustration into focused, precise wrestling, he got it back at SummerSlam.

"In my opinion, we saw a much more mature Randy Orton at SummerSlam," Jim Ross said. "He's always been an elite athlete, but he's been his own worst enemy at times. At SummerSlam, he kept his head in the game and he won the match, in large part because he kept his emotions in check. Funny enough, but it was Christian who paid the price for losing his cool."

So Orton has matured as a wrestler, but what did the match say about Christian?

10 POSSIBLE CAREER CHOICES FOR EDGE

Spinal stenosis ended Edge's wrestling career, but at just 37 years old, he can't be ready to settle into retirement, can he? Granted, at SummerSlam, Edge was showing some fullness of face we'd never seen during his wrestling days. Yet with all his natural energy, we find it hard to believe Edge is headed for the rocking chair just yet.

But what does a "Rated R Superstar" do after his wrestling days are finished? We gave the matter some thought and came up with 10 new career options Adam Copeland may want to explore:

The Wrestler freelancer. Edge started his wrestling career after winning an essay contest on why he wanted to be a pro wrestler. With his writing ability and wrestling expertise, he'd be a natural.

Sex therapist. Let's face it, any man who made out with Lita in front of an international TV audience during a "Live Sex Celebration" must have a secret or two worth sharing.

Consultant for *True Blood*. Edge isn't a vampire, but he did portray one. He spent plenty of time palling around with Gangrel as part of The Brood. If anyone can tell the HBO producers the ins and outs of sexy vampire culture, it's Edge.

Folding chair salesman. The man who invented the "Con-chair-to" obviously understands quality seating, especially the dent-resistant kind.

Motivational speaker. Judging by the impact his words had on Christian at SummerSlam, Tony Robbins and Rudy Giuliani have nothing on him.

Linebackers coach. Edge's spear has taken down some of wrestling's all-time greats. If he can impart his know-how to a defensive backfield, that team is going to the Super Bowl.

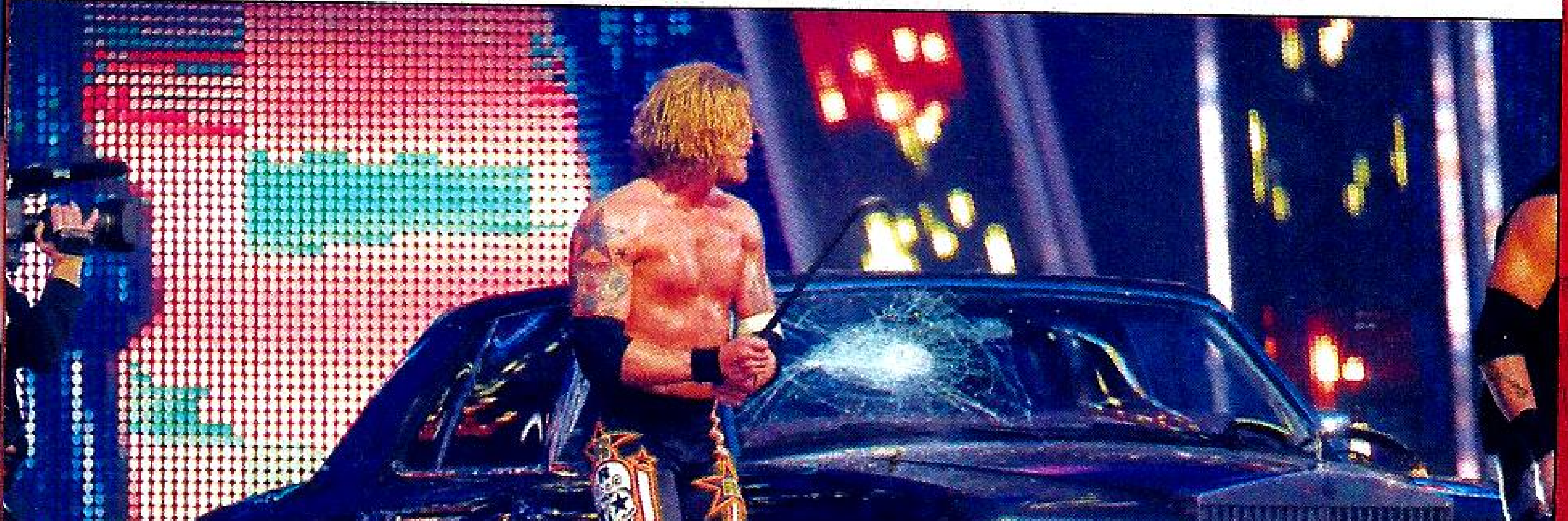
Veterinarian. Apparently, he's become quite the expert on whiny little bitches.

Nikon pitchman. Remember, he's a longtime proponent of flash photography, although in the digital age, he may need to become more familiar with the latest technology.

Registered nurse. Having spent so much time in surgery and rehabilitation over the years, Edge should be able to contribute quite a bit to any healthcare facility.

Used car salesman. Edge has made a career out of lying through his teeth to fans and fellow wrestlers alike. Plus, his demolition of Alberto Del Rio's automobile at WM 27 suggests he knows a thing or two about used cars. Just remember to insist on the CarFax.

—Dan Murphy



Would you be buy a used car from this man?

By coming unraveled by Edge's abandonment, Christian proved that he lacks the mental toughness to survive as a World champ. He drew his boldness from someone other than himself, and when Edge walked away, Christian panicked. That indicates a deep-seated lack of self-confidence in a man who otherwise exudes bravado. Deep down, Christian doesn't believe he is good enough to be World champion; if he did, he wouldn't have relied on having Edge in his corner to gain an advantage over Orton. He tried to take a shortcut and it cost him the World title.

As harsh as they were, perhaps Edge's words can serve as a wake-up call to Christian. He *has* become a whiner. He *has* become complacent. And if he has any chance of becoming a three-time World champion, he needs to take Edge's words to heart. To survive at the top, a wrestler must be able to adapt to new challenges. Randy Orton did it at SummerSlam and now he has a shiny gold belt to show for it. ☐

Orton drives a chair into the champion's gut (right), setting him up for an RKO on the ring-steps (below) just prior to the winning pinfall.

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THE WRESTLING ANALYST

KURT ANGLE

Years Pro:	13
Size:	6', 240
"*PWI* 500" Listings:	2011: 18
	2010: 9
	2009: 12
	2008: 2
	2007: 4
	2006: 2
	2005: 6
	2004: 36
	2003: 3
	2002: 6
	2001: 1
	2000: 13
Titles:	IWGP heavyweight
	PPW heavyweight
	TNA World heavyweight
	TNA World tag team
	TNA X division
	WCW U.S.
	WCW championship
	WWE World heavyweight
	WWE championship
	WWF European
	WWF hardcore
	WWE Intercontinental
	WWE tag team
PWI Awards:	Comeback of the Year (2003)
	Feud of the Year (2000, 2003, 2007)
	Match of the Year (2003, 2005)
	Most Hated Wrestler of the Year (2000)
	Most Inspirational Wrestler of the Year (2001)
	Most Popular Wrestler of the Year (2003)
	Rookie of the Year (2000)
	Wrestler of the Year (2003)

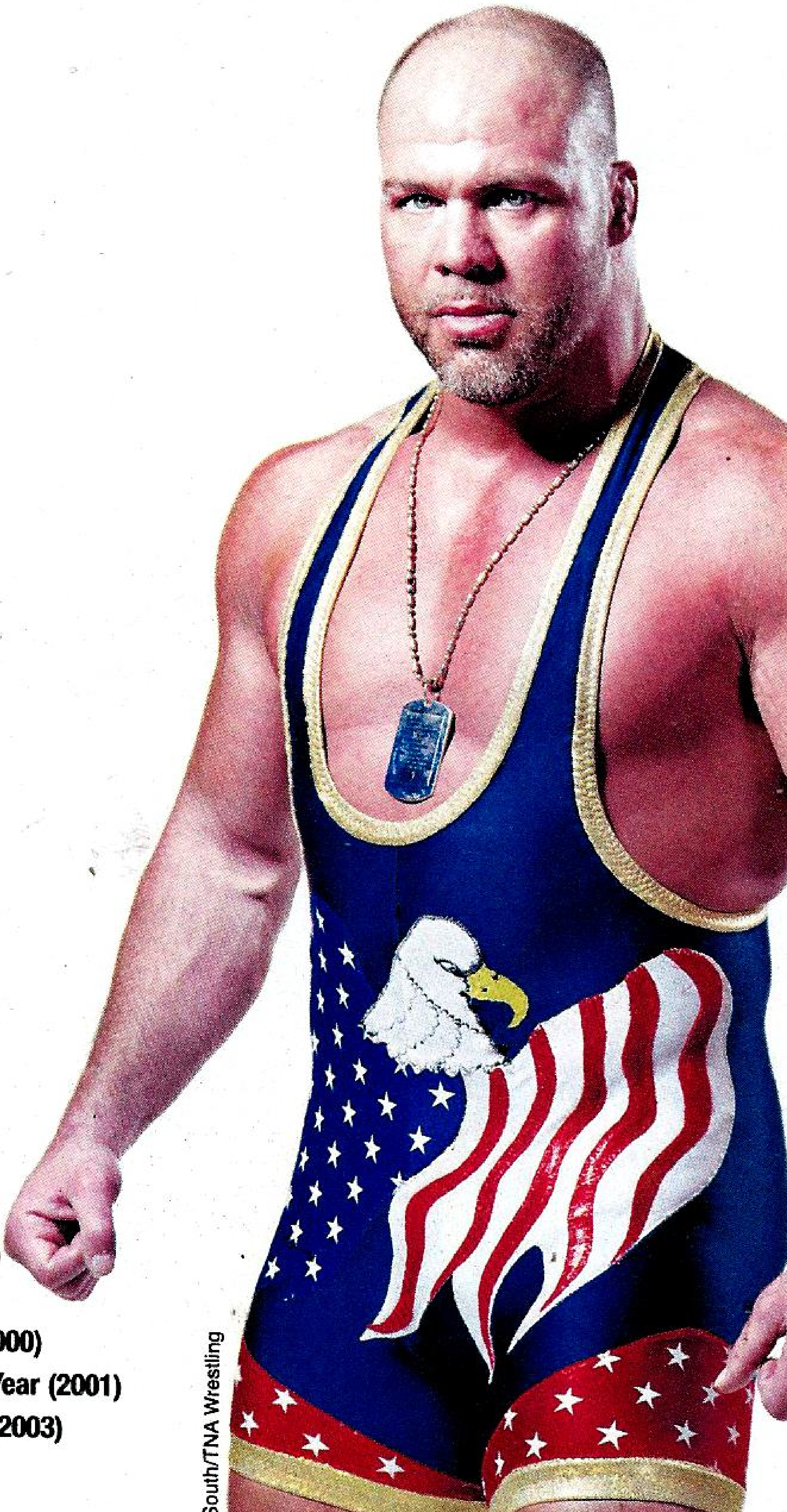


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

THE NUMBERS

OFFENSE (9.5): There may be no greater practitioner of pure scientific wrestling than Kurt Angle. His is a style of combination wrestling based on years of experience and an absolute mastery of ring psychiatry. The simplicity of the anklelock is overshadowed by its viciousness and his ability to apply it effortlessly.

DEFENSE (9.0): Angle knows what his opponent is going to do and when he is going to do it even before the opponent has a chance to put a maneuver into motion. He will give up offense in order to gain a defensive advantage. Few wrestlers in the game are as adept at playing possum in order to set up his offense.

EXPERIENCE (10.0): A true student of the game, Angle has gained international experience in his decade-plus as a professional that few others will ever see throughout their entire careers. No one has been a main-event wrestler in both WWE and TNA as long as Angle.

CONDITIONING (9.5): At 42, Angle remains one of the best-conditioned wrestlers in the industry. He lives with the very real threat that his surgically repaired neck will not withstand the pounding it has endured since his amateur days and, by necessity, works diligently to make sure to build the muscles in that part of his body in particular.

STAMINA (9.5): Although he has the talent to keep matches brief, Angle maintains the ability to string together an Ironman match if needed. He has slowed a bit, yet still remains one of the best pure athletes in the sport. Easily the spryest of the heavyweights in TNA, Angle could give any X division competitor a run for his money as well.

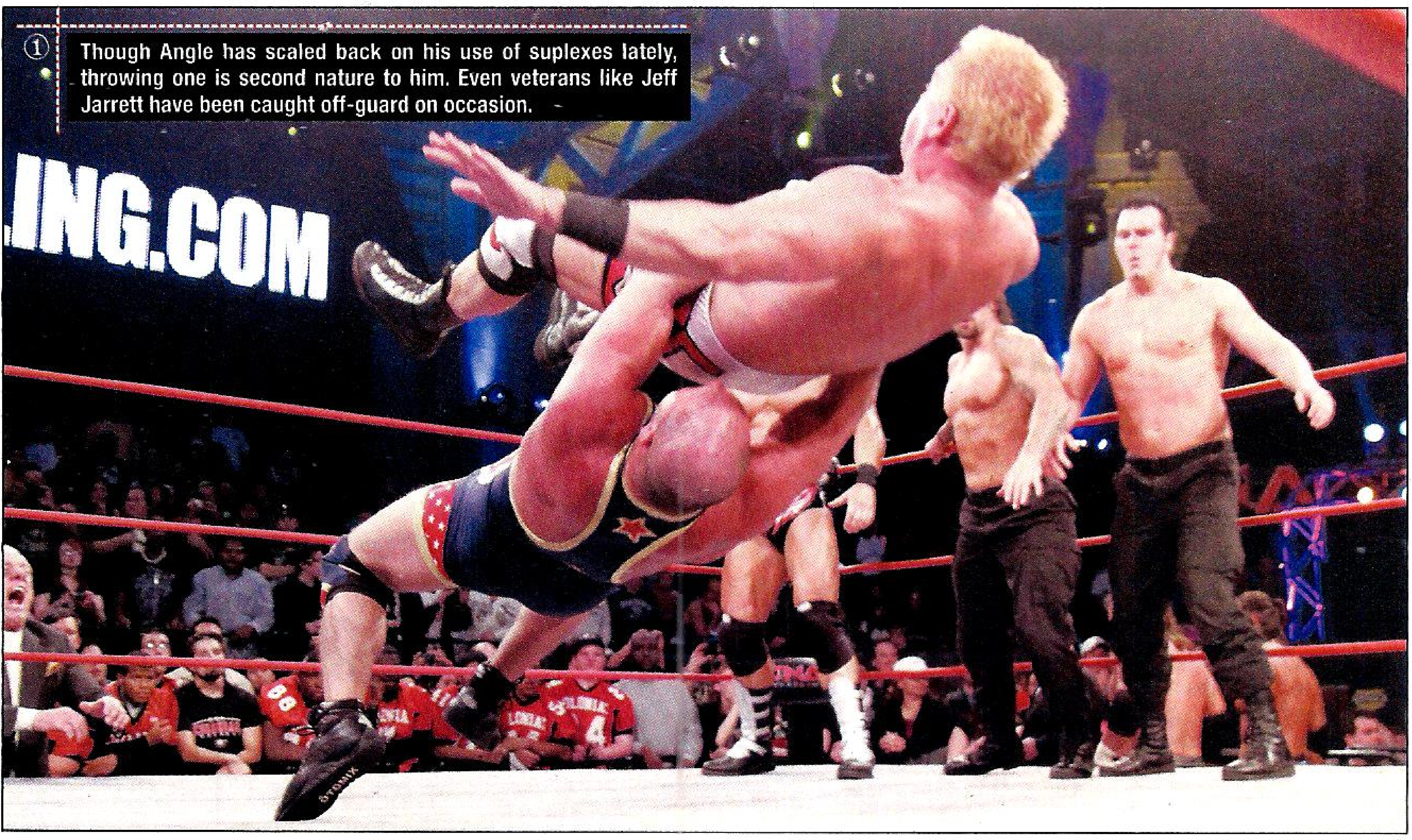
SCIENCE (10.0): Angle is a throwback to a time when men studied their opponents and, once the match began, knew how to capitalize on mistakes they knew were coming. Rarely, if ever, is Angle guilty of abandoning his strategy for any given opponent. He generally relies on a steady stream of wear-down maneuvers to set the pace of a match and high-impact aerial and ground attacks to seal the deal.

POWER (8.5): In Angle's early career, his patented Angle slam was usually delivered from a dead-lift position combined with a two-step walkthrough. With age and experience, Angle's power game has shifted to a more fluid delivery, oftentimes with a moving start. Angle wisely rations how, and when, he uses his power.

SPEED (9.0): Although Angle has never shied away from facing an opponent head-on, his greatest speed may actually be evidenced through his lateral movement. An innate ability to slip through holds and attack opponents from the side has been a staple of Angle's repertoire for years.

ABILITY TO ABSORB PUNISHMENT (9.0): A byproduct of his excellent conditioning and stamina is Angle's ability to absorb punishment. Like any seasoned veteran, Angle is willing to give a little to get a lot, and will utilize an apparent lull in his offense to set up his next string of attacks.

QUALITY OF OPPOSITION (9.5): Though it may seem unfair to penalize Angle a half-point, the fact is, until recently defeating Sting for his fifth TNA World championship, Angle was sidetracked by feuds with Abyss and Jeff Jarrett. It should be noted that throughout his career, Angle has never ducked anyone, whether in WWE, TNA, or New Japan.



① Though Angle has scaled back on his use of suplexes lately, throwing one is second nature to him. Even veterans like Jeff Jarrett have been caught off-guard on occasion.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

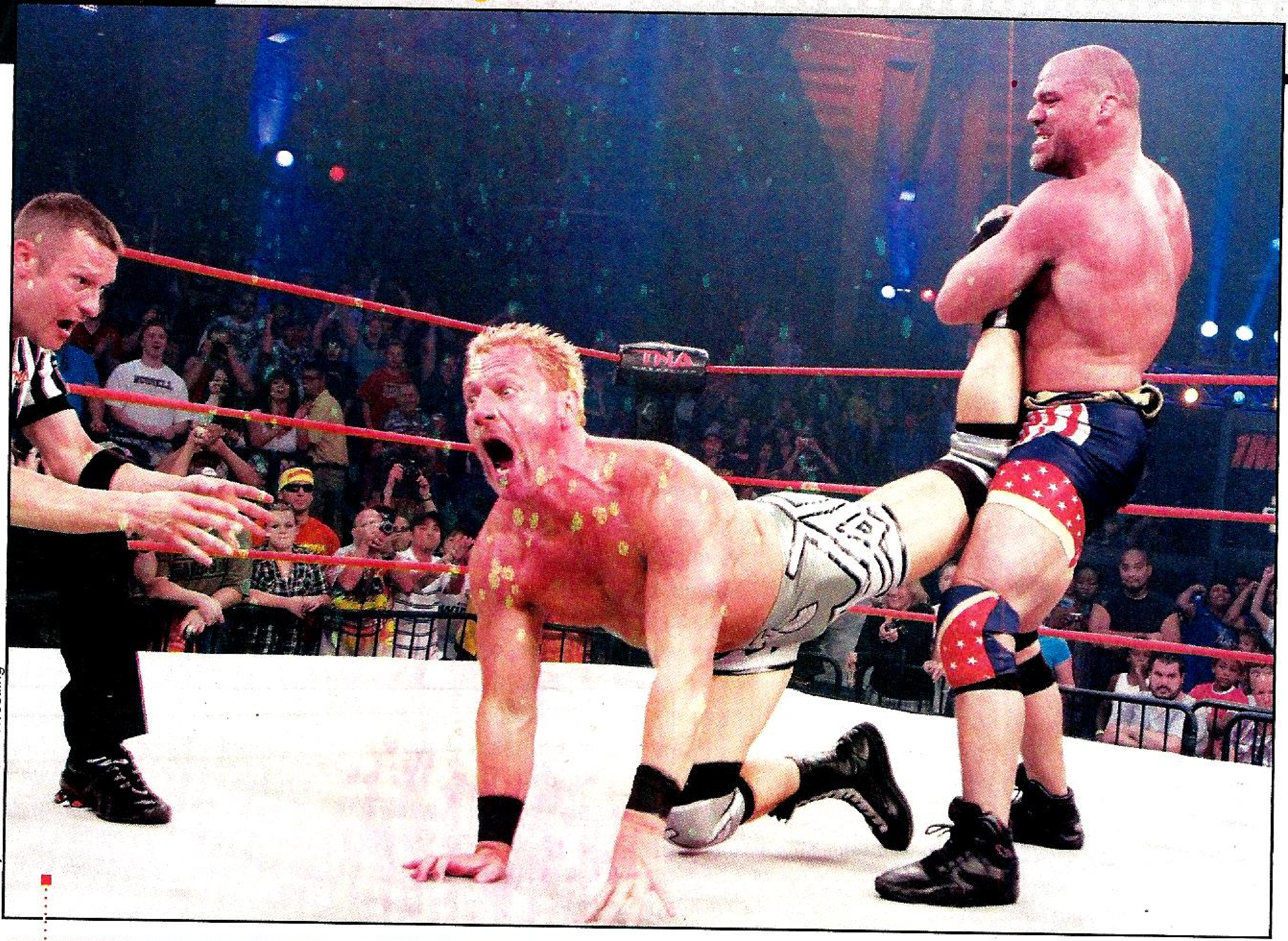


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

② Angle's anklelock is brilliant in its simplicity as well as its effectiveness. As a true ring technician, Angle makes sure he's in a good position to strike with this finisher at any given time.

③ At his age, Angle much prefers wrestling opponents on the mat. However, he will go to the air for a high-impact move like this superplex. Given his history of neck injuries, it's a wonder Angle ever chooses to leave his feet at all.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

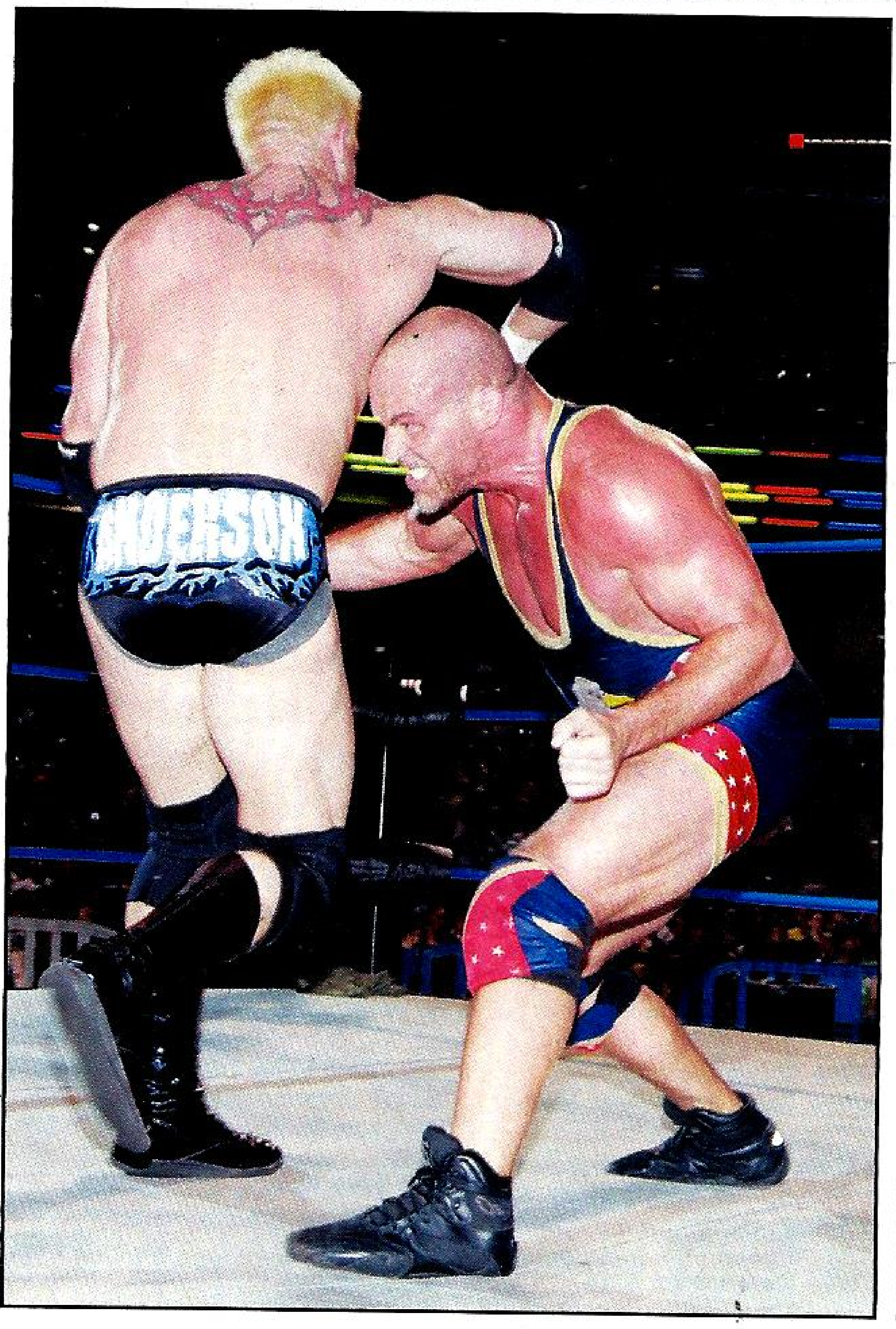


Photo by George Napolitano

Angle's tremendous lateral quickness enables him to avoid high-impact power moves like Mr. Anderson's clothesline. Hardly a speed merchant, Angle is still very quick on his feet when he needs to be. ④

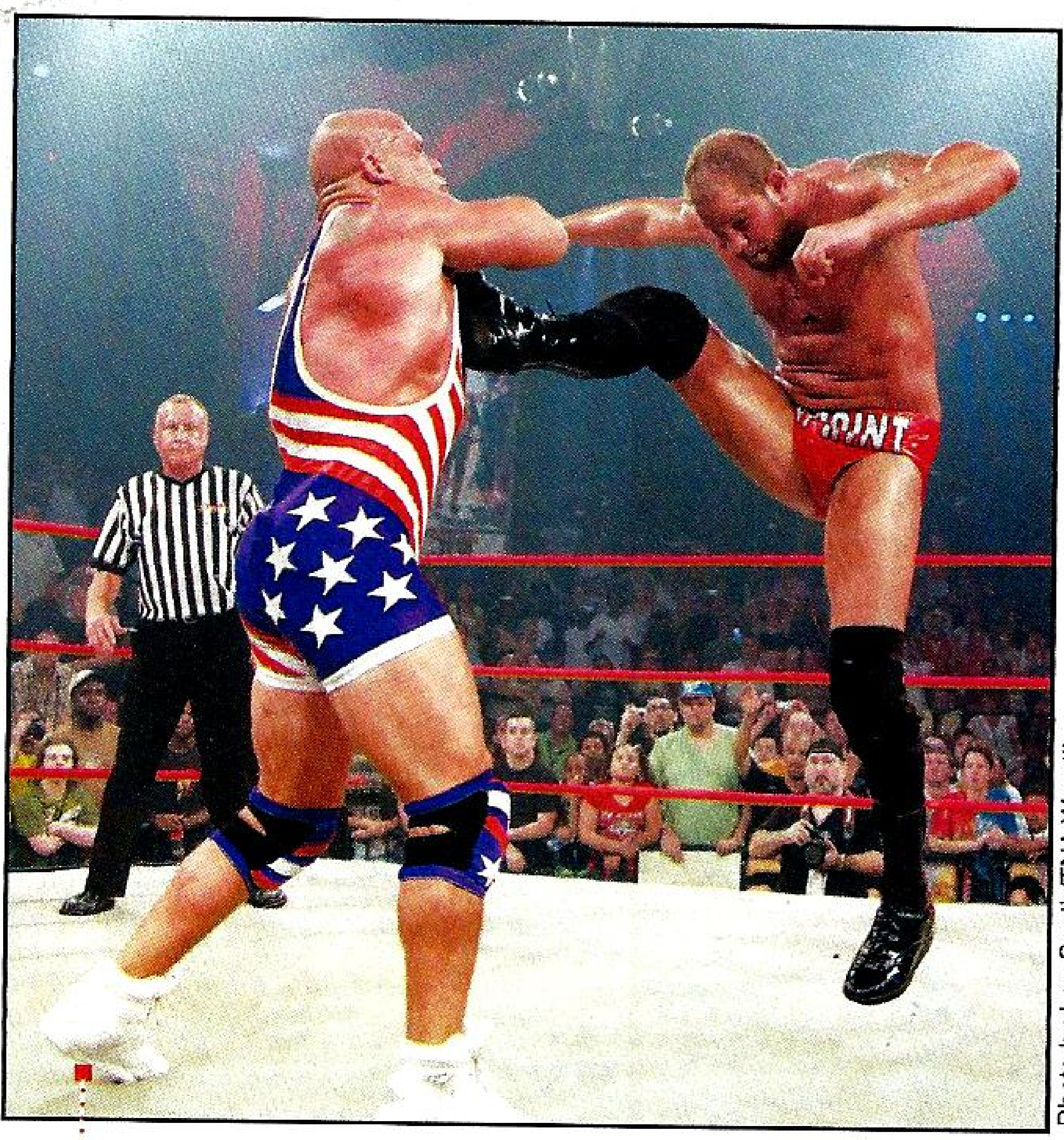


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

⑤ Despite his defensive chops, Angle employs a purely offensive philosophy in the ring. He's willing to take a big boot from Matt Morgan in order to land a blow or two of his own. Considering his stellar career, can anybody argue with Angle's approach?

THE ANALYSIS

REPERTOIRE: Angle has made the transition from amateur phenomenon to top-tier professional wrestler better than anyone in the sport's history. Unlike other amateur greats-turned-pro who completely altered their approaches, Angle's success is the result of being able to adapt amateur fundamentals into the pro game. In recent years, Angle has scaled back on aerial moves in favor of more mat-based holds and wear-down moves.

STRENGTHS: Physically, Angle can tie opponents in knots if he so chooses. His six-foot frame may seem slight given the industry's emphasis on girth, but Angle has always relied on a combination of grappling and leverage holds to springboard the rest of his repertoire. Psychologically, Angle starts the fight with an opponent prior to stepping in the ring. His opponents know they have been heavily scouted and often try to adjust their strategies to throw him off. That always works to Kurt's advantage.

WEAKNESSES: Pure and simple, Angle is a hothead. There are many things he has said and done over the years that resulted from the man getting swept up in the emotions of the moment. So far, he's been able to back up his words with his wrestling, but that won't always be the case. He'd be better served using more discretion.

DEFINING CAREER MOMENT: May 19, 2002. With so many career accomplishments to choose from, Angle's defining moment may have actually been a byproduct of one of his most embarrassing moments. At Judgment Day 2002, Angle lost a hair-vs.-hair match to Edge and was subsequently shaved bald. More than a mere cosmetic change, the new look symbolized Angle's transformation from the pseudo-preppy, amateur wrestler to more of an unrelenting butt-kicking machine.

FUTURE: Angle is firmly ensconced in future legend mode at this point in his career, yet shows no immediate signs of seeking the golden watch that comes with retirement. He is still a pillar of TNA and earns his face time on *Impact Wrestling* each week. Given his popularity, drive, and conditioning, Angle can continue along as an active competitor for as long as he can avoid serious injury.

OFFICIAL RATINGS

TOP 10

1 **KURT ANGLE**
240, Pittsburgh, PA
(–) TNA World champion

2 **RANDY ORTON**
245, St. Louis, MO
(1) WWE World champion

3 **ALBERTO DEL RIO**
240, San Luis Potosi, Mexico
(7) WWE heavyweight champion

4 **JOHN CENA**
240, West Newbury, MA
(2) No. 1 contender WWE heavyweight title

5 **CM PUNK**
222, Chicago, IL
(4) No. 2 contender WWE heavyweight title

6 **CRIMSON**
252, Brooklyn, NY
(–) No. 1 contender, TNA World title

7 **DAVEY RICHARDS**
205, Othello, WA
(9) Ring of Honor heavyweight champion

8 **HECTOR GARZA**
210, Nuevo Leon, Mexico
(–) CMLL champion

9 **ADAM PEARCE**
248, San Diego, CA
(–) NWA champion

10 **GO SHIOZAKI**
240, Kumamoto, Japan
(6) GHC heavyweight champion

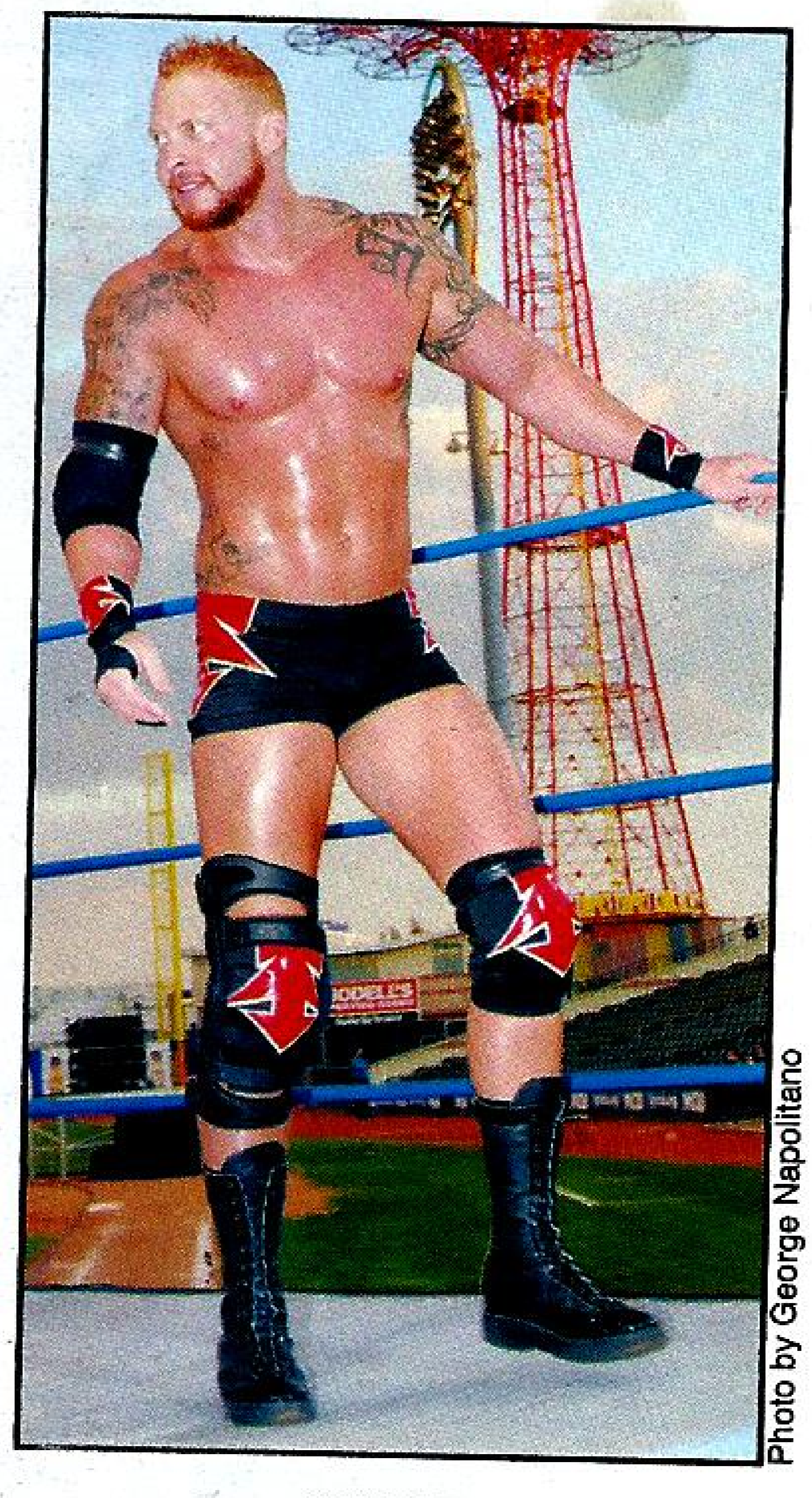


Photo by George Napolitano

CRIMSON

TAG TEAMS

1 **EVAN BOURNE & KOFI KINGSTON**
Combined weight: 450 pounds
(–) WWE tag team champions

2 **HERNANDEZ & ANARQUIA**
Combined weight: 515 pounds
(–) TNA World tag team champions

3 **GIANT BERNARD & KARL ANDERSON**
Combined weight: 590 pounds
(2) IWGP, GHC tag team champions

4 **CHARLIE HAAS & SHELTON BENJAMIN**
Combined weight: 497 pounds
(3) ROH tag team champions

5 **CJ PARKER & DONNIE MARLOWE**
Combined weight: 475 pounds
(–) FCW tag team champions

6 **CHRIS HERO & CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI**
Combined weight: 475 pounds
(4) No. 1 contenders ROH tag team title

7 **KENZO & KEIJI MUTO**
Combined weight: 490 pounds
(9)All Japan Unified tag team champions

8 **DAVID OTUNGA & MICHAEL McGILLICUTTY**
Combined weight: 474 pounds
(1)No. 1 contenders WWE World tag team title

9 **JON DAVIS & KORY CHAVIS**
Combined weight: 449 pounds
(6) NWA tag team champions

10 **MASATO YOSHINO & PAC**
Combined weight: 331 pounds
(8) DGUSA Open the United Gate champions

RAW

WWE Champion:
ALBERTO DEL RIO
(2) 240, San Luis Potosi, Mexico
1—JOHN CENA
(C) 240, West Newbury, MA
2—CM PUNK
(1) 222, Chicago, IL
3—THE MIZ
(3) 231, Cleveland, OH
4—DOLPH ZIGGLER
(5) 221, Hollywood, CA
5—JOHN MORRISON
(–) 223, Los Angeles, CA
6—R-TRUTH
(7) 235, Charlotte, NC
7—EVAN BOURNE
(–) 183, St. Louis, MO
8—KOFI KINGSTON
(9) 221, Ghana, West Africa
9—JACK SWAGGER
(10) 263, Perry, OK
10—ALEX RILEY
(4) 251, Washington, DC

SMACKDOWN

World Champion:
RANDY ORTON
(C) 245, St. Louis, MO
1—MARK HENRY
(6) 418, Silsbee, TX
2—CODY RHODES
(7) 223, Marietta, GA
3—WADE BARRETT
(5) 265, Manchester, England
4—DANIEL BRYAN
(3) 190, Aberdeen, WA
5—SHEAMUS
(4) 280, Dublin, Ireland
6—CHRISTIAN
(1) 240, Toronto, ON
7—EZEKIEL JACKSON
(2) 309, Guyana
8—TED DiBIASE JR.
(9) 235, West Palm Beach, FL
9—JOHNNY CURTIS
(–) 240, Westbrook, ME
10—SIN CARA
(–) 175, Mexico City, Mexico

TNA

World Champion:
KURT ANGLE
(3) 240, Pittsburgh, PA
1—CRIMSON
(4) 252, Brooklyn, NY
2—GUNNER
(8) 245, Atlanta, GA
3—BULLY RAY
(9) 296, Hell's Kitchen, NY
4—STING
(C) 255, Venice Beach, CA
5—MR. ANDERSON
(q) 243, Green Bay, WI
6—ROB VAN DAM
(2) 237, Los Angeles, CA
7—JEFF JARRETT
(3) 235, Nashville, TN
8—BRIAN KENDRICK
(6) 184, Venice Beach, CA
9—ERIC YOUNG
(7) 225, Florence, ON
10—AUSTIN ARIES
(–) 210, Milwaukee, WI

RING OF HONOR

Champion:
DAVEY RICHARDS
(C) 205, Othello, WA
1—JAY LETHAL
(–) 225, Elizabeth, NJ
2—KYLE O'REILLY
(6) 195, Vancouver, BC
3—EDDIE EDWARDS
(1) 214, Boston, MA
4—RODERICK STRONG
(3) 215, Tampa, FL
5—KENNY KING
(–) 229, Las Vegas, NV
6—ADAM COLE
(10) 190, Panama City, FL
7—MIKE ELGEN
(7) 265, Toronto, ON
8—MIKE BENNETT
(8) 225, Carver, MA
9—TOMMASO CIAMPA
(9) 199, Boston, MA
10—RHETT TITUS
(–) 203, Long Beach Island, NJ

Top **10** and tag team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (—) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue. Note: In an effort to keep the ratings as up-to-date as possible, these pages are often the last to be sent to the printer. Thus, the ratings may reflect changes not reflected in the remainder of the issue.

FOR PERIOD ENDED AUGUST 25, 2011

COMBAT ZONE WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Devon Moore; 1—Adam Cole; 2—Sami Callihan; 3—MASADA; 4—Jake Crist; 5—Drake Younger; 6—Scotty Vortekz; 7—Danny Havoc; 8—A.R. Fox; 9—BLK Jeez; 10—Ryan McBride.

DRAGON GATE USA: CHAMPION—YAMATO; 1—CIMA; 2—PAC; 3—Johnny Gargano; 4—Chuck Taylor; 5—Akira Tozawa; 6—Ricochet; 7—Masato Yoshino; 8—Brodie Lee; 9—Masaaki Mochizuki; 10—Rich Swann.

DREAMWAVE: CHAMPION—Acid; 1—Hammett; 2—Austin Roberts; 3—Mason Beck; 4—Colt Cabana; 5—Dan Lawrence; 6—Nick Brubaker; 7—Silas Young; 8—Marshe Rockett; 9—Steve Boz; 10—Shane Hollister.

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: CHAMPION—Papadon; 1—Chris Wylde; 2—Bazooka Joe; 3—Kekoa the Flyin' Hawaiian; 4—Kid America; 5—AHTU; 6—Matt Saigon; 7—Damian Dragon; 8—Cole Callaway; 9—Bobby Shields; 10—Mr. Ooh La La.

EVOLVE: CHAMPION—Vacant; 1—Chuck Taylor; 2—Johnny Gargano; 3—Fit Finlay; 4—A.R. Fox; 5—Ricochet; 6—Silas Young; 7—Jon Davis; 8—Bobby Fish; 9—Munenori Sawa; 10—Kevin Steen.

FLORIDA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Bo Rotundo; 1—Seth Rollins; 2—Leo Kruger; 3—Damien Sandow; 4—Richie Steamboat; 5—Dean Ambrose; 6—Conor O'Brien; 7—Rick Victor; 8—Leakee; 9—Derrick Bateman; 10—Brad Maddox.

FULL IMPACT PRO WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Vacant; 1—Sami Callahan; 2—Jake Manning; 3—Caleb Konley; 4—A.R. Fox; 5—Blain Rage; 6—Bobby Fish; 7—Craig Classic; 8—Chris Gray; 9—Lince Dorado; 10—Scott Reed.

MARYLAND CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Cobian; 1—Sami Callihan; 2—Tyler Hilton; 3—Nui Tofiga; 4—Robbie Zukko; 5—The Bruiser; 6—Napalm Bomb; 7—Tom Brandi; 8—Alexander James; 9—Chris Clow; 10—Kirby Mack.

PLATINUM CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Grotesque; 1—Mason; 2—Kyle Matthews; 3—Shane Marx; 4—Chip Day; 5—Pandora; 6—The Vandal; 7—Jay Fury; 8—Dany Only; 9—Marko Polo; 10—Davey Richards.

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA: CHAMPION—Kevin Steen; 1—Chris Hero; 2— Claudio Castagnoli; 3—Chuck Taylor; 4—Peter Avalon; 5—Joey Ryan; 6—Brandon Gaston; 7—Roderick Strong; 8—Willie Mack; 9—Akira Tozawa; 10—Eddie Edwards.

SHOWTIME ALL-STAR WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Kid Kash; 1—Chris Michaels; 2—Chase Stevens; 3—David Young; 4—Ryan Genesis; 5—Cody Melton; 6—Arrick Andrews; 7—Shane Williams; 8—Derrick King; 9—Johnny Bandana; 10—Sean Casey.

WOMEN SUPERSTARS UNCENSORED: CHAMPION—Mercedes Martinez; 1—Jessicka Havok; 2—Alicia; 3—Lexxus; 4—Serena; 5—Brittney Savage; 6—Sassy Stephie; 7—Kristin Astara; 8—Rain; 9—Jazz; 10—Allisyn Kay.

NWA

Champion:
ADAM PEARCE
(8) 248, San Diego, CA
1—CHANCE PROPHET
(1) 225, Sacramento, CA
2—COLT CABANA
(2) 233, Chicago, IL
3—SHAUN TEMPERS
(3) 232, Cornelia, GA
4—DAMIEN WAYNE
(4) 237, Hampton, VA
5—TONY BARONI
(5) 214, Surrey, BC
6—ACE ROCKWELL
(6) 212, Atlanta, GA
7—SADIST
(7) 250, Parts Unknown
8—JOEY RYAN
(–) 210, Los Angeles, CA
9—RAYOUJI SAI
(9) 230, Osaka, Japan
10—JIMMY RAVE
(10) 200, Atlanta, GA

JAPAN

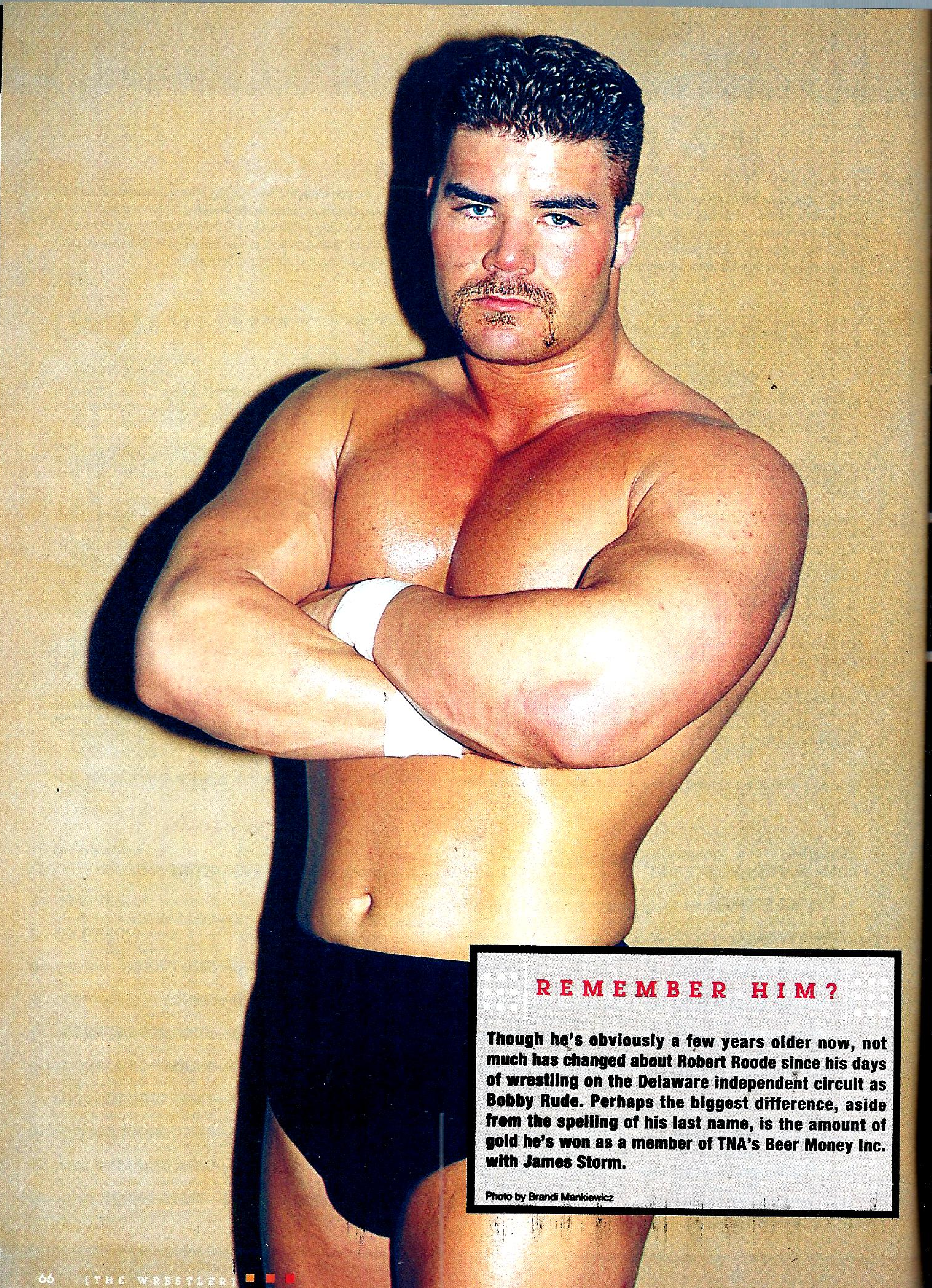
1—GO SHIOZAKI
(1) 240, Kumamoto, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion
2—HIROSHI TANAHASHI
(2) 230, Ogaki, Japan
IWGP heavyweight champion
3—SUWAMA
(3) 260, Kanagawa, Japan
AJPW Triple Crown champion
4—SHINSUKE NAKAMURA
(6) 245, Mineyama, Japan
5—MVP
(5) 259, Miami, FL
6—NAOMICHI MARUFUJI
(7) 190, Saitama, Japan
7—KOTA IBUSHI
(8) 190, Kagoshima, Japan
8—THE SHEIK
(–) 242, Damascus, Syria
9—HIROOKI GOTO
(4) 227, Kuwana, Japan
10—YUJI NAGATA
(–) 238, Chiba, Japan

MEXICO

1—JEFF JARRETT
(6) 230, Nashville, TN
AAA Champion
2—HECTOR GARZA
(–) 210, Nuevo Leon, Mexico
CMLL champion
3—AVERNO
(5) 174, Mexico City, Mexico
4—L.A. PARK
(1) 255, Monterrey, Mexico
5—LA MASCARA
(2)186, Mexico City, Mexico
6—DR. WAGNER JR.
(4) 216, Torreón, Mexico
7—MASCARA DORADA
(–) 170, Guadalajara, Mexico
8—ATLANTIS
(7) 202, Los Altos, Mexico
9—VIRUS
(7) 175, Mexico City, Mexico
10—EXTREME TIGER
(10)148, Tijuana, Baja California

WOMEN

1—MICKIE JAMES
(2) 128, Richmond, VA
TNA Knockouts champion
2—KELLY KELLY
(1) 108, Jacksonville, FL
WWE Divas champion
3—BETH PHOENIX
(–) 155, Buffalo, NY
4—WINTER
(–) 140, Chelsea, England
5—MERCEDES MARTINEZ
(3) 147, Waterbury, CT
6—MADISON EAGLES
(4) 160, Sydney, Australia
7—KACEE CARLISLE
(9) 155, San Francisco, CA
8—BRITTANY FORCE
(6) 130, Johnstown, PA
9—SARA DEL REY
(–) 160, Philadelphia, PA
10—TASHA SIMONE
(10) 156, Dallas, TX



REMEMBER HIM?

Though he's obviously a few years older now, not much has changed about Robert Roode since his days of wrestling on the Delaware independent circuit as Bobby Rude. Perhaps the biggest difference, aside from the spelling of his last name, is the amount of gold he's won as a member of TNA's Beer Money Inc. with James Storm.

Photo by Brandi Mankiewicz

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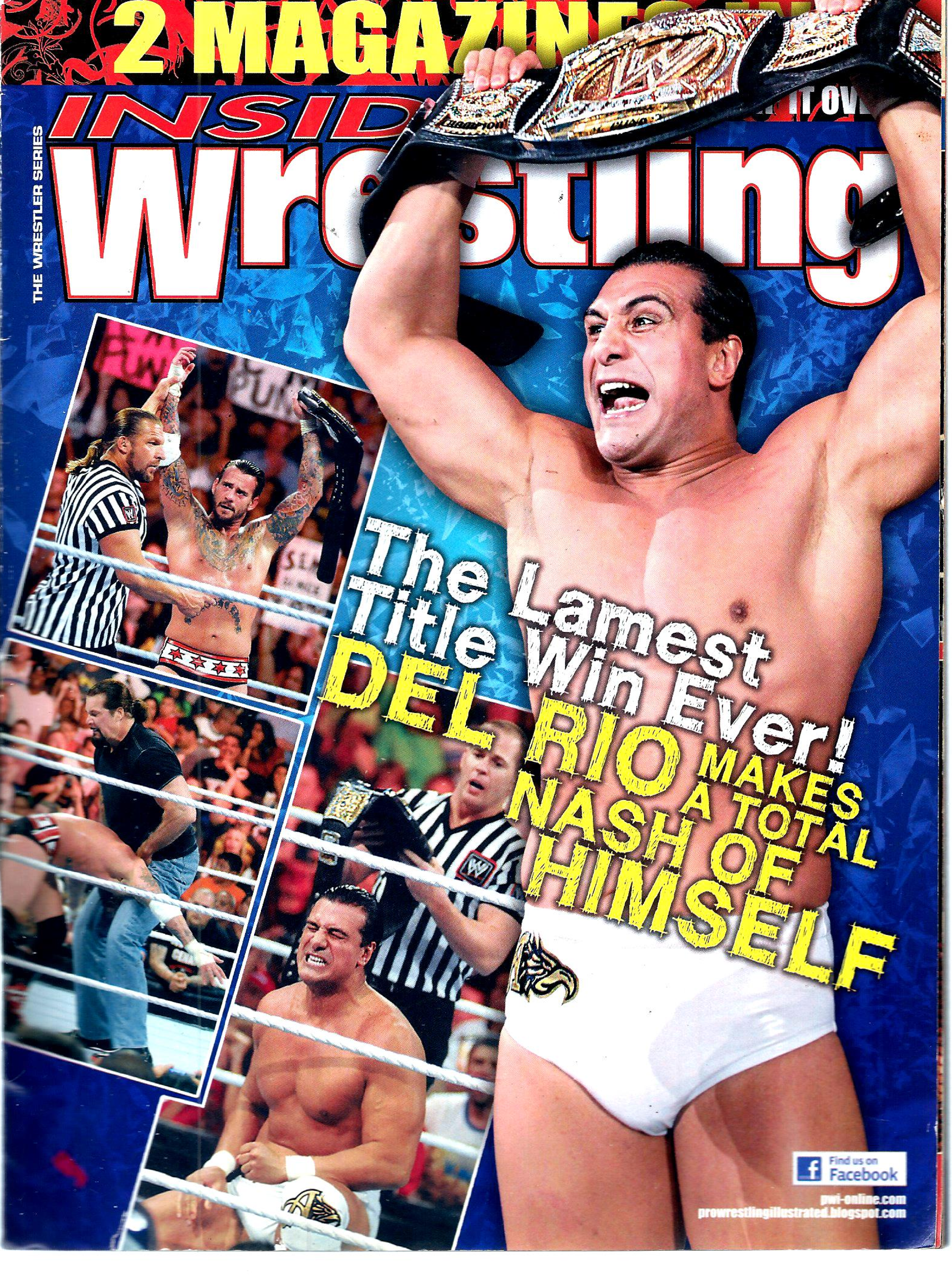

The Lamest Title Win Ever!

DEL RIO MAKES A TOTAL NASH OF HIMSELF

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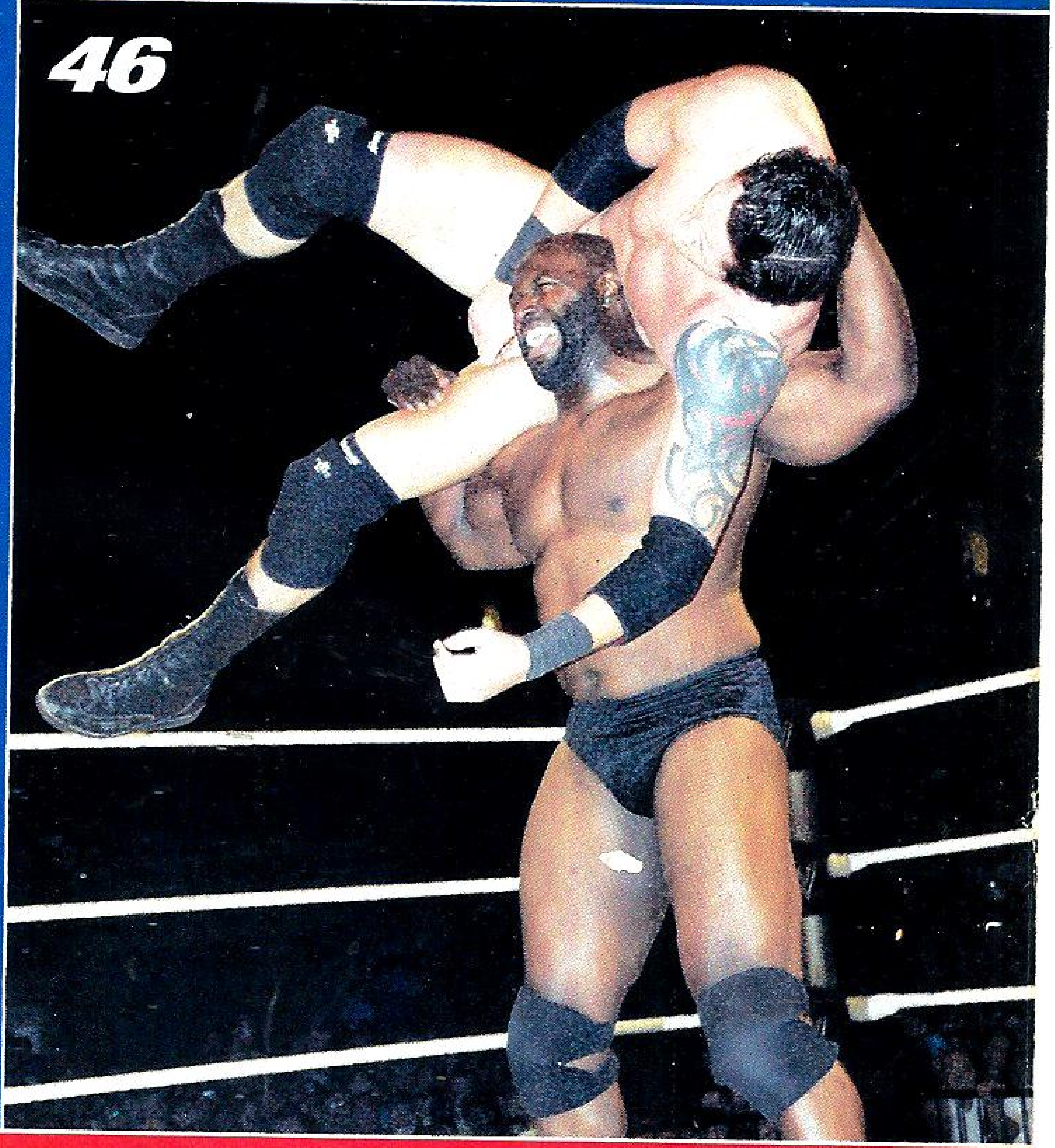
THE MAGAZINE THAT RIPS THE LID OFF PRO WRESTLING



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Ever notice how Bischoff seems to have a problem with every wrestler he comes across? Believe it or not, there are reasons for that

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Guess it's also Del Rio's destiny to be involved in a conspiracy to have a former great eliminate his competition for the WWE championship

COVER PHOTOS:
George Napolitano

COVER DESIGN:
Sam Weyant

Look for the Volume 44, 2012, issue of *The Wrestler/ Inside Wrestling* on sale November 22, 2011

sincerely yours

Send letters to:
Sincerely Yours
P.O. Box 96
Fort Washington, PA 19034
or e-mail letters to
insideletters@yahoo.com

COWARDLY HERO

As much as I want to like Kurt Angle, his recent feud with Crimson makes that all but impossible, because he's acted like nothing but a coward.

Clearly, Angle has been impressed and apparently scared by Crimson's early success in TNA. Why else would he sneak-attack Crimson on *Impact Wrestling* before they could meet in the ring? Angle says Crimson needs to earn his respect, but why would Crimson even want the respect of somebody who's acting like a punk?

JEFFREY KHALE
Detroit, MI

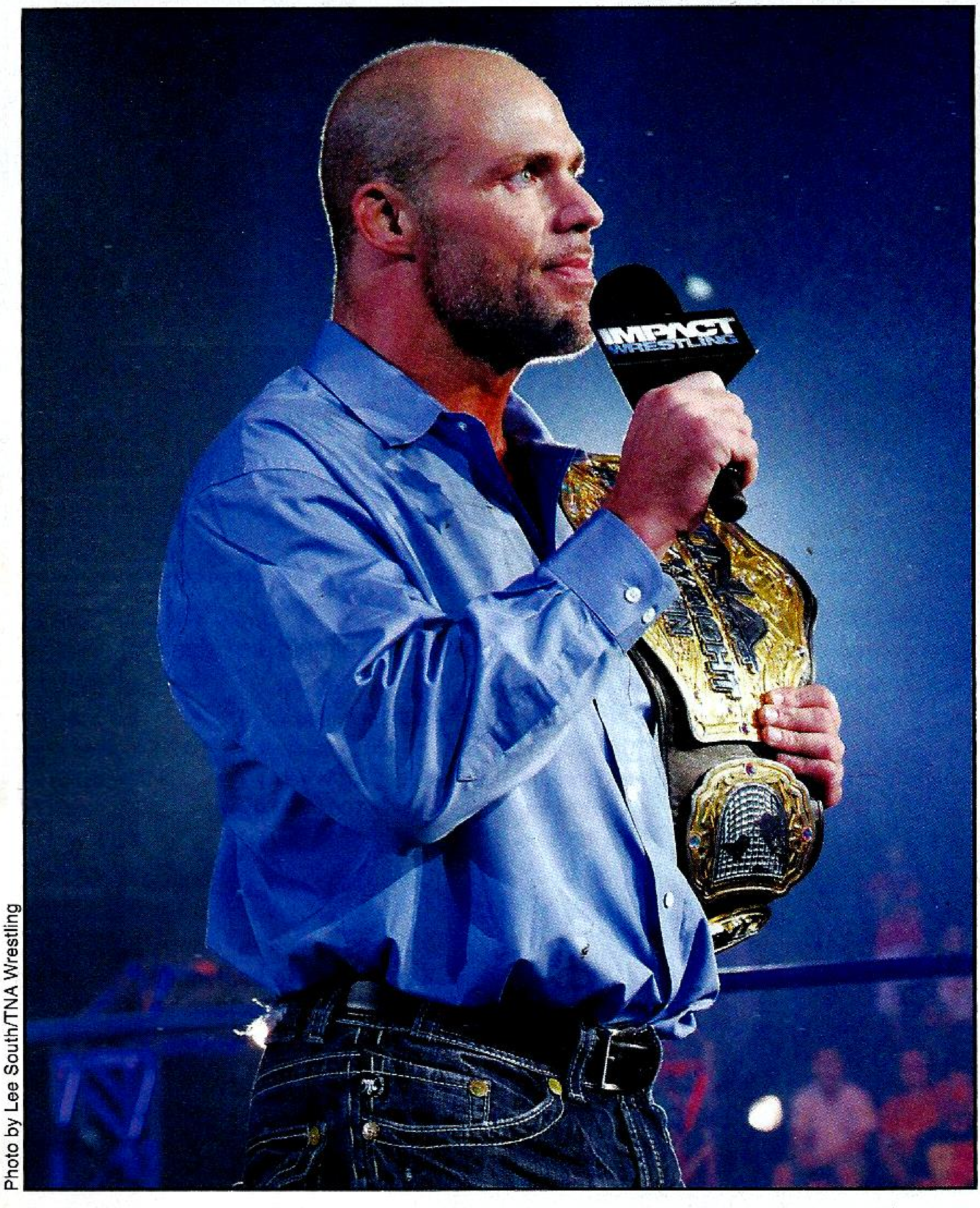


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Kurt Angle likes to think of himself as a hero, but reader Jeffrey Khale says Angle's actions during his feud with Crimson depict nothing but a coward.

YOU'RE WELCOME

Thank you very much for your awesome interview with Mr. Anderson ("Hotseat," Volume 42, 2011).

Anderson is my favorite wrestler and has been ever since his WWE days as Ken Kennedy.

I've always enjoyed his big-mouthed in-ring persona, but your interview showed me that he's also a fairly humble and very articulate man. Now that I've seen the other side of him, I have to say, I like Mr. Anderson even more.

HOLLY SCOTT
Halifax, NS

PUNKED OUT

Enough is enough, already! CM Punk shook up the wrestling world a few months ago when he delivered his controversial rant on *Raw*. Yes, it was entertaining and compelling, but now it seems we can't get through an episode of *Raw* without hearing some long-winded, self-serving lecture or a debate between him and one of his many enemies.

Hey, Punk, you're angry and you want change in WWE. We get it. Now, please just shut up and wrestle!

HARRY ESSIAN
Brockton, MA

CONSPIRACY?

I am not a conspiracy theorist or a muckraker, but I find it ironic that Melina and Gail Kim were released by WWE while Kelly Kelly, Beth Phoenix, and Natalya have been given big pushes recently.

I am not saying that Beth and Natalya do not deserve their airtime. They do. Kelly is a different story. But is it just a coincidence that all three are blondes, while Melina and Gail are very ethnic looking?

And it's not as if Melina's and Gail's abilities can be questioned.

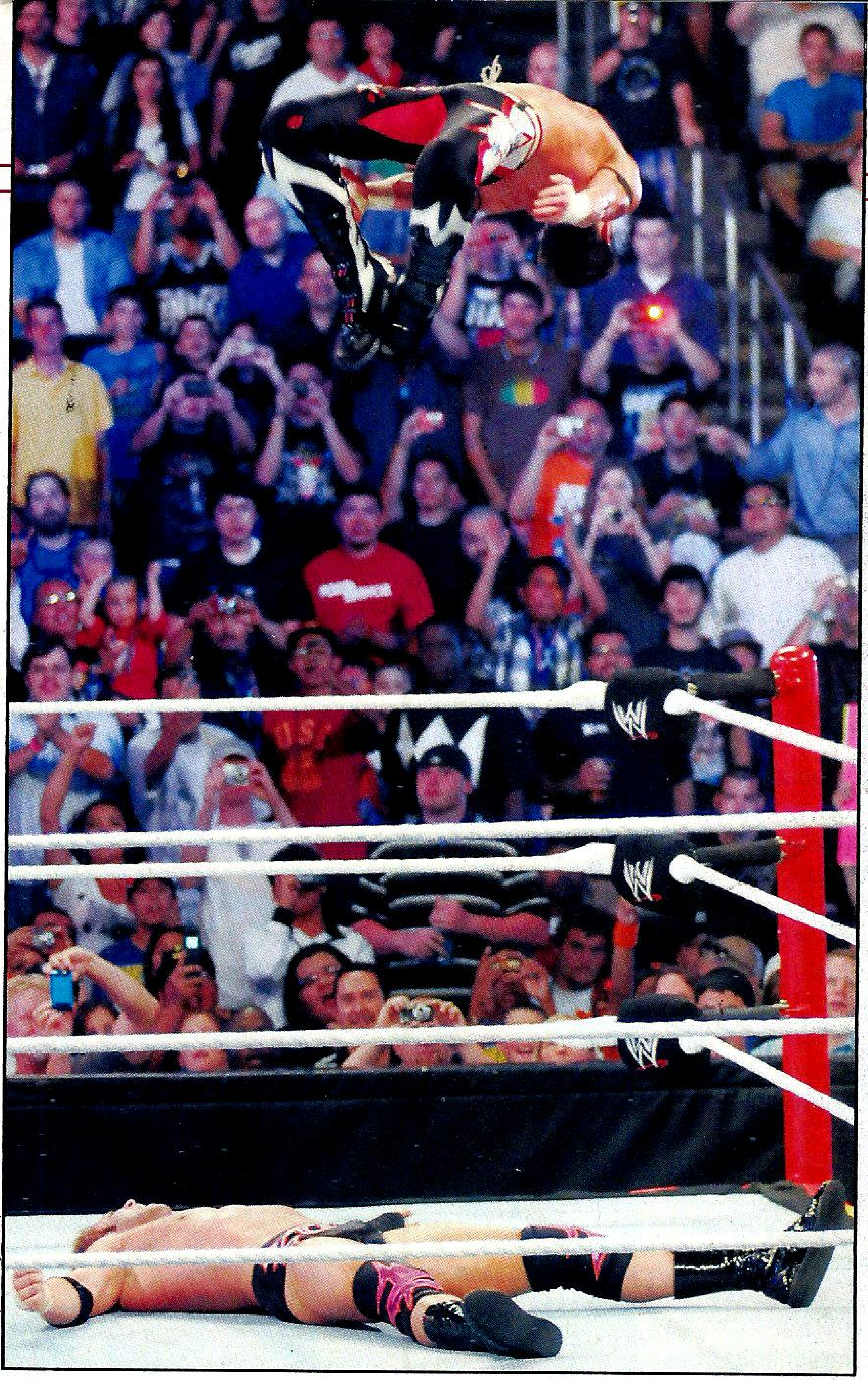


Photo by George Napolitano

Few wrestlers excite the crowd more than master aerialist Evan Bourne. Reader John O'Connor is pleased that Bourne's hard work was rewarded with a tag title run with Kofi Kingston.

Both are former champions, and were very popular with WWE fans. I find it highly implausible that WWE couldn't find a way to keep them on the roster. I believe the fact that they don't fit the "Barbie" look that WWE values so much had a role in their releases.

LAURA CREADY
Seattle, WA

[Editor's note: It should be pointed out that Eve and Brie Bella—both brunette Latinas and former Divas champions—have also been prominently featured on WWE programming in recent months.]

FUTURE WWE STAR

I recently attended a Florida Championship Wrestling show, and Briley Pierce blew me away! Briley is Dolph Ziggler's younger brother, and, from what I saw, I think he's going to be even better than his big brother once he's called up to WWE.

JARROD KOLZIEWECHY
Tampa, FL

ANGRY PHILLY FAN

As a huge ROH fan, I have to say I am outraged that there is no way for me to watch the promotion's new TV show! Several years ago I purchased a hi-def television, just so I could watch Ring of Honor wrestling. Now I'm told I can watch the new show online. That's great. And to think, Philadelphia was once considered the home base for Ring of Honor. Now loyal fans can't even watch the show because there is not a single Sinclair channel in the Philadelphia market. What a slap in the face.

GREGORY PITMAN
Philadelphia, PA

ABOUT TIME

I am so happy for Evan Bourne on his tag team title victory with Kofi Kingston. I am happy for Kingston, too, but he's already won some secondary titles. Bourne goes to such great lengths, risking life and limb with his dangerous aerial maneuvers, just to please the crowd *every* time he sets foot in a ring. It is nice to see Evan finally get the recognition and exposure he deserves.

JOHN O'CONNOR
jocpaddymac@comcast.net

MAD PROPS TO TNA

I think TNA deserves a lot of credit for coming up with the Bound For Glory point system. The whole concept just proves what I've been saying for years: Wrestling doesn't need half-naked women or other bells and whistles, because, deep down, wrestling fans still get pumped about what happens on the mat. I also feel that having the competition climax at BFG makes the pay-per-view infinitely more meaningful.

ANTONIO BILLUPS
Baltimore, MD □

names makin' news

By Harry Burkett

ONE YEAR IN the making, **Alberto Del Rio** finally realized his destiny—and brought WWE's long-standing booking plans into fruition—by finally capturing the WWE championship on August 14 at SummerSlam. Merely cashing in his Money in the Bank briefcase to abruptly challenge **CM Punk**, who had just pinned **John Cena** to be declared the undisputed champion, would've been enough to generate controversy, but the fact that a returning **Kevin Nash** power-bombed Punk to set up Del Rio's easy pinfall overshadowed the Mexican superstar's remarkable achievement.

While the Punk-Cena-Nash fallout obscured his victory in the short term, Del Rio's emergence as a bona fide main-eventer is more significant for WWE in the long term. More than any other superstar preceding him, Del Rio takes WWE beyond its North American roots and gives it a truly international feel. His Mexican heritage is part of his image, but it is not the predominant reason for his main-event presence. He isn't portrayed as an outsider like former WWE champions **The Iron Sheik** and **Yokozuna**, for example, but as an integral part of the mainstream.

A primary mission of **Triple-H** and **John Laurinaitis** is to develop a multinational talent roster to accurately reflect WWE's international scope. Sin Cara is also part of that effort, and it's likely that stars from beyond the Western Hemisphere will be recruited in the near future.

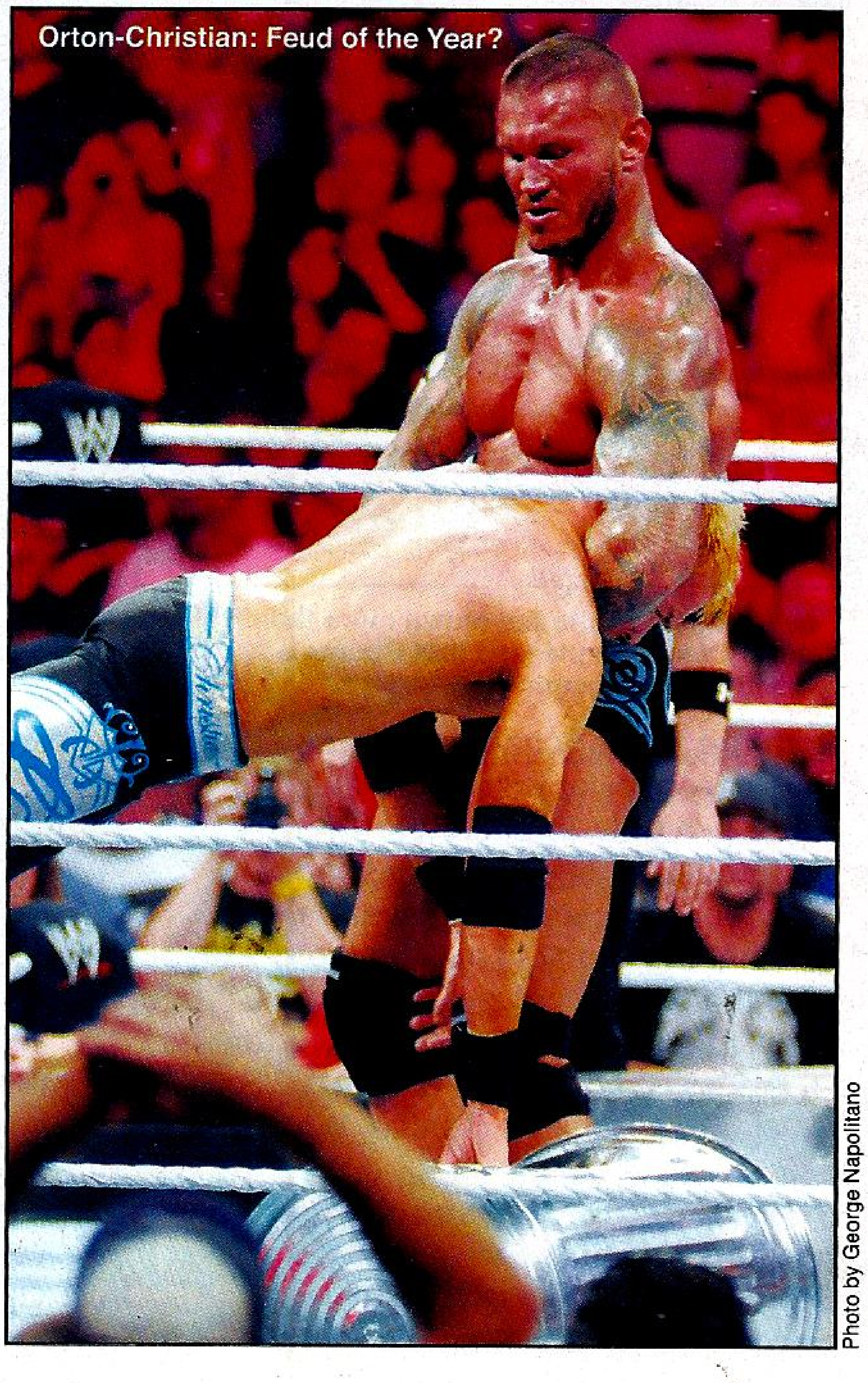
There's no truth to the rumor that **Randy Orton** regained the World heavyweight championship from **Christian** in order to boost WWE's global standing in Missouri, but their no-holds-barred encounter was another remarkable chapter in their series over the past several months.

It has been a long time since the World title has been bounced between two individuals like this. Consider the history between these two: Orton defeated Christian for the World title on the May 6 edition of *Smackdown*, Orton successfully defended the belt against Christian at Over the Limit and Capitol Punishment, and Christian exploited a special stipulation to win the title from Orton by disqualification at Money in the Bank.

Their clash at SummerSlam was rumored to be their final confrontation. Despite Christian's mental game of cat-and-mouse leading up to the event, he was "game on" at SummerSlam and used his TLC experience to maximum advantage, taking Orton by surprise at many points and exhibiting some true polish with the kendo stick. But Orton proved too aggressive and too innovative, particularly when he planted Christian with spike DDT on a trash can late in the match. Christian again used the kendo stick to seize the advantage in the final minutes and attempted a sunset flip, only to have Orton catch him with the RKO in mid-air and drop him on the ring steps inside the ring. Orton groggily covered Christian for the three-count and his third World title.

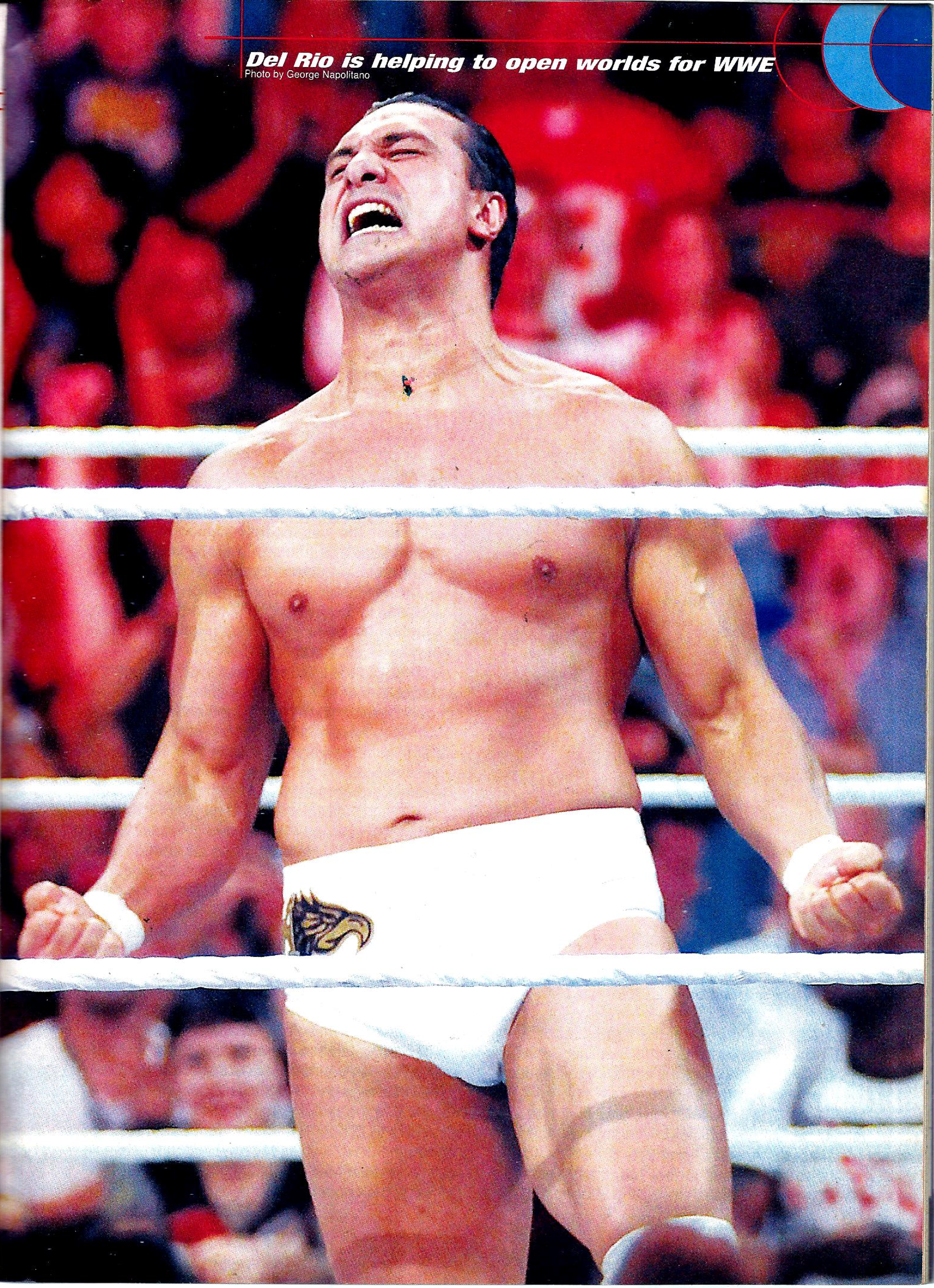
While Christian seemed at points uninspired during promos and in the lead-up to each of these matches, the veteran really changed gears and delivered top-quality performances when it came to the in-ring action. Orton-Christian should be a strong candidate for 2011 Feud of the Year.

In other bouts at SummerSlam, **Wade Barrett** beat **Daniel Bryan** ... **Kelly Kelly** upset **Beth Phoenix** to



Orton-Christian: Feud of the Year?

Photo by George Napolitano



Del Rio is helping to open worlds for WWE

Photo by George Napolitano

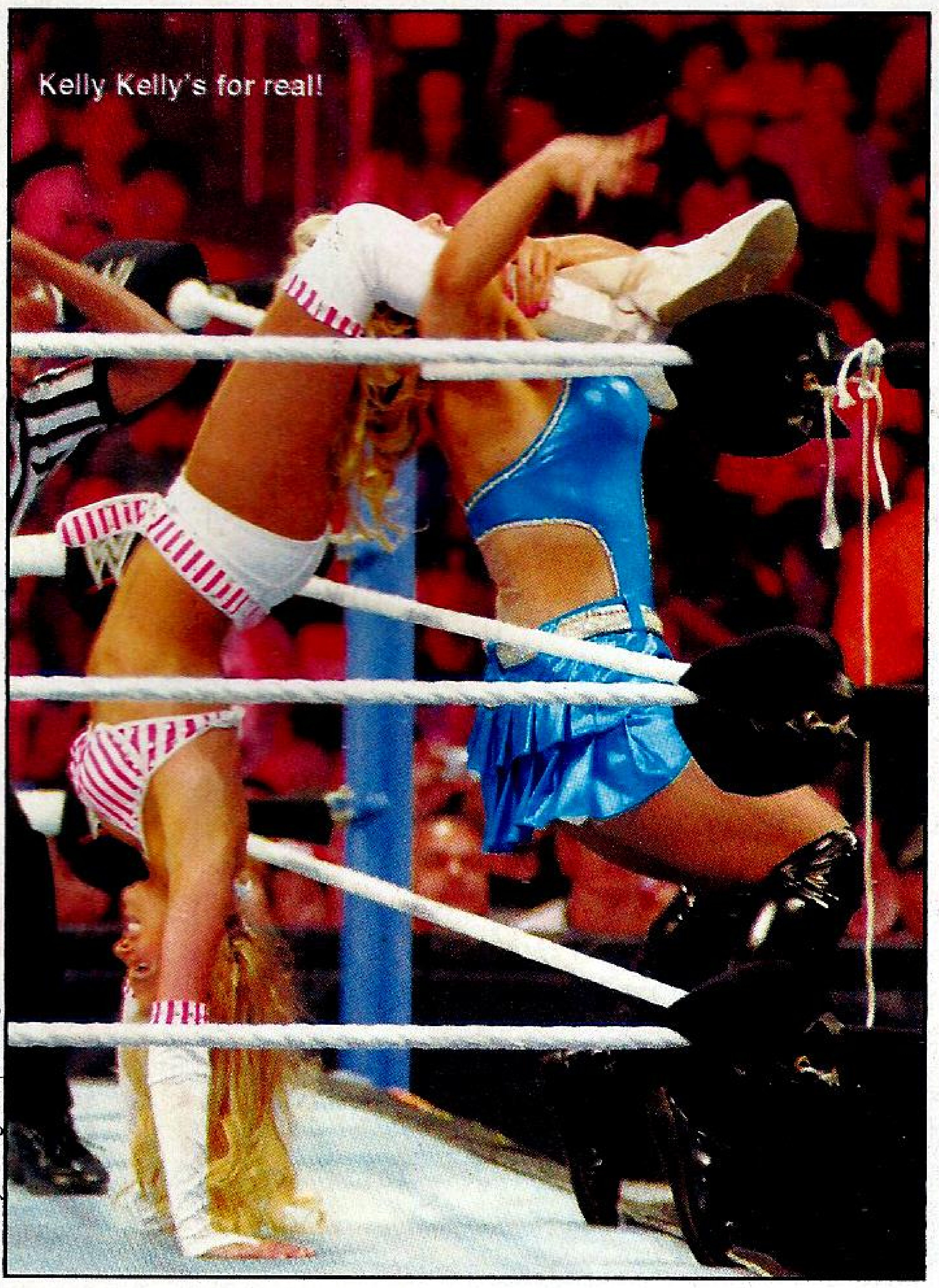

Kelly Kelly's for real!

Photo by George Napolitano

keep the Divas title … **Mark Henry** beat **Sheamus** by countout … **Rey Mysterio Jr.**, **Kofi Kingston**, and **John Morrison** defeated **The Miz**, **R-Truth**, and Alberto Del Rio.

Conspicuous by his absence from the Staples Center in Los Angeles was **Jim Ross**, who, despite joining **Michael Cole** and **Jerry Lawler** at the broadcast table for *Raw*, was not part of the announce team at SummerSlam. Stated Ross at jrsbbq.com, "Obviously, I would have liked to have been part of the SummerSlam announce team, but I enjoyed tweeting throughout the show and gained about 2,000 new followers as a result."

Okay, that made it worthwhile. But a lot of Ross' fans had to be disappointed that **Booker T** replaced Ross at the announce table. That's not an intentional knock against the six-time former world champion, but let's just say that he makes **Stevie Ray** seem insightful.

Ross reported that he had a good time traveling with Lawler from Los Angeles to San Diego for *Raw* the following day. I would've loved to have listened to those conversations.

While WWE still refuses to give fans what they want when it comes to returning J.R. to the lead announcer's chair, its consumer products division is finding more innovative ways to find out exactly what the WWE Universe wants in terms of merchandising and where they want to shop for it. With WWE's Shop Zone sales relatively flat, the company surveyed a sampling of its fans to see if they would be interested in purchasing another line of John Cena apparel and whether they would be interested in buying it from major retail chains at reduced prices. WWE continues to lead the way in marketing and reaching out to its customer base.

Likewise, Mattel is offering an eclectic array of WWE Legends action figures, some of which border on the obscure, at least in terms of mass merchandising. Surefire sellers include **The Rockers** and **Andre the Giant**. Customers were also allowed to vote at Mattel's collectibles website, mattycollector.com, on which figures they would like to see in 2012. Thanks to the fans, those figures will include **Elizabeth**, **Arn Anderson**, **Tully Blanchard**, **King Kong Bundy**, and **"Diamond" Dallas Page**. By the way, Alberto Del Rio's first action figure is due out sometime this fall.

It seemed that **Linda McMahon** was facing hard times after leaving her post as WWE CEO and failing in her bid for the U.S. Senate, considering that she was recently sighted steering an oyster boat and hauling in crabs on the Long Island Sound. But that turned out to be a photo-op, as McMahon is still in campaign mode and is expected to run for the Connecticut-based Senate seat that will be left vacant by the departing **Joe Lieberman** in 2012.

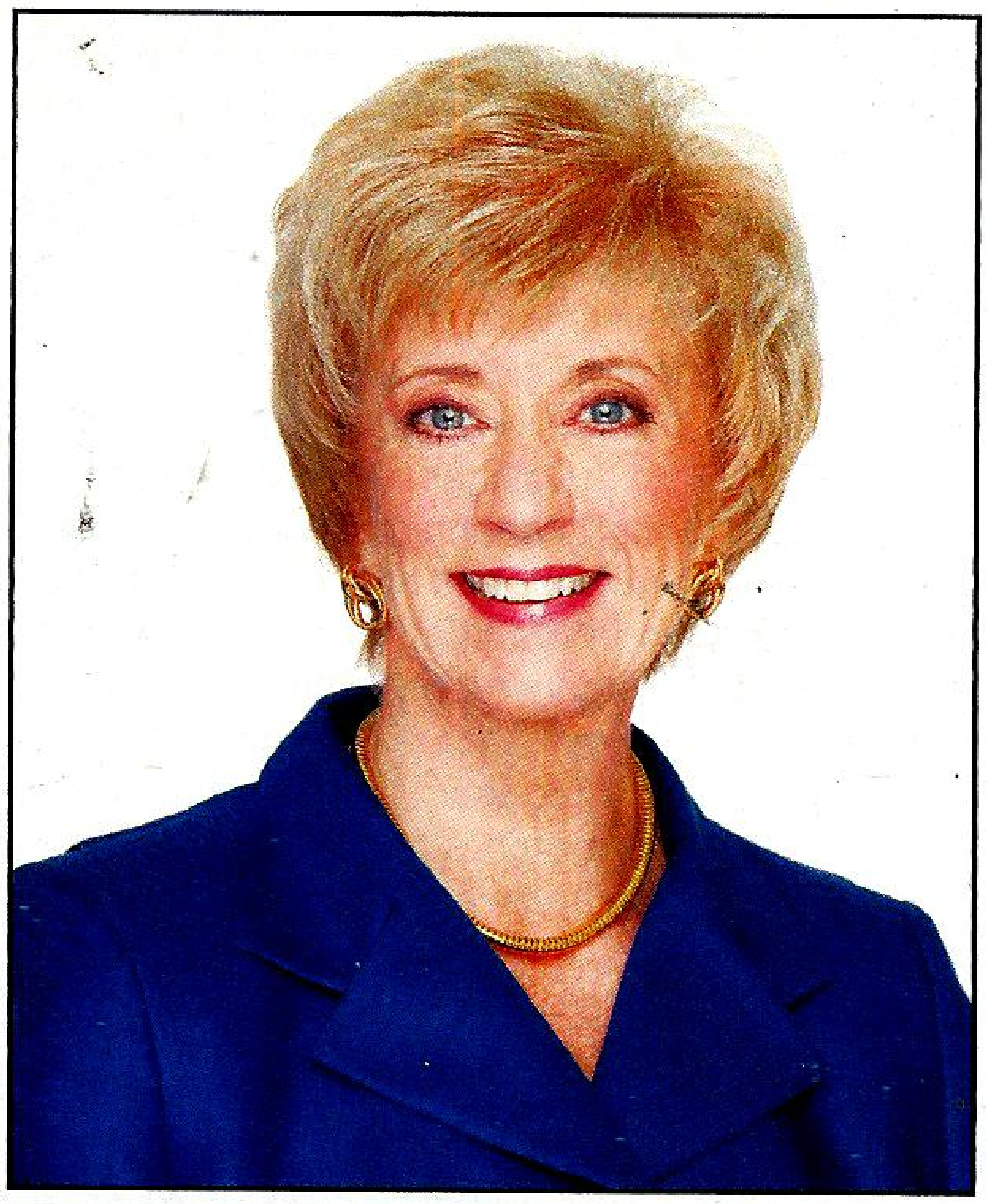
According to her 2010 campaign post-mortem, the consensus is that women, in particular, voted for her Democratic rival, State Attorney General **Richard Blumenthal**. Apparently, women prefer males who were *not* on the Harvard swim team over cold female business executives.

"Women are generally harder on other women," **Debbie Walsh**, director of the Rutgers Center for American Women and Politics, told *The Wall Street Journal*. "But Linda McMahon has an added issue: Women find the business she is intrinsically tied to distasteful and can't differentiate between the business she runs and who she is."

McMahon has worked hard to soften her image this summer, and her closest associates suggest that is closer to her real-life personality anyway and that she has enjoyed touring charter schools, speaking to local chambers of commerce, and visiting various civic groups. And these organizations like to see her coming: McMahon has donated significant amounts of money to non-profits across Connecticut as of late.

The latest read on WWE's most recent round of cutbacks is that the talent roster, particularly CM Punk, were sorry to see **Chris Masters** go, but most were glad to watch **Gail Kim** and **Melina** leave. The female lockerroom must be a truly scary place!

After some concern over the direction of TNA's X



Is Linda Mac ready to throw her hat in the ring?

division, the company's signing of five X division-caliber wrestlers should alleviate any fears. **Zema Ion**, **Mark Haskins**, **Jesse Sorensen**, **Anthony Neese**, and former WWE cruiserweight champion **Kid Kash** should significantly boost the roster.

One reason for these hirings is that TNA is trying to compensate for **Generation Me's** departure. Oddly enough, **Rob Van Dam** took a swipe at the youngsters, claiming they didn't show him respect in the lockerroom. Van Dam's friend and former partner Booker T chirped up regarding the team once again known as The Young Bucks via Twitter. He apparently was not impressed when he met them during a recent WWE tryout. (The following is unedited.)

"A friend RVD made comments a few weeks back ... now I no why, I say a small tag team called the YB's did hay shake my hand no! Yes I said SMALL."

Besides the fact that Booker's Twitter comments are even more unintelligible than his broadcast contributions, these two veterans seem to be really piling on two young guys just trying to make it in the business. Matt and Nick Jackson have responded to RVD's comments, stating that he seemed to like his privacy and they were respecting his space. Obviously, this young duo failed to adequately maneuver the complex morass known as lockerroom etiquette.

Here's the non-news story of the day: Current TNA star **Matt Morgan** says he flirted with the idea, but decided against a return to WWE. Morgan made this revelation while promoting his role in the MTV series *Made*.

NEWS ANALYSIS

RIO DE JANEIRO FOR DEL RIO? I don't own WWE stock, but, if I did, I'd feel very confident about WWE's future and to the degree it has expanded into an international enterprise. I do envision a time when WWE has a presence in every corner of the world, just like Disney, McDonald's, and Nike. And when the WWE title is finally on the line in Brazil, it won't be a figment of our imagination!

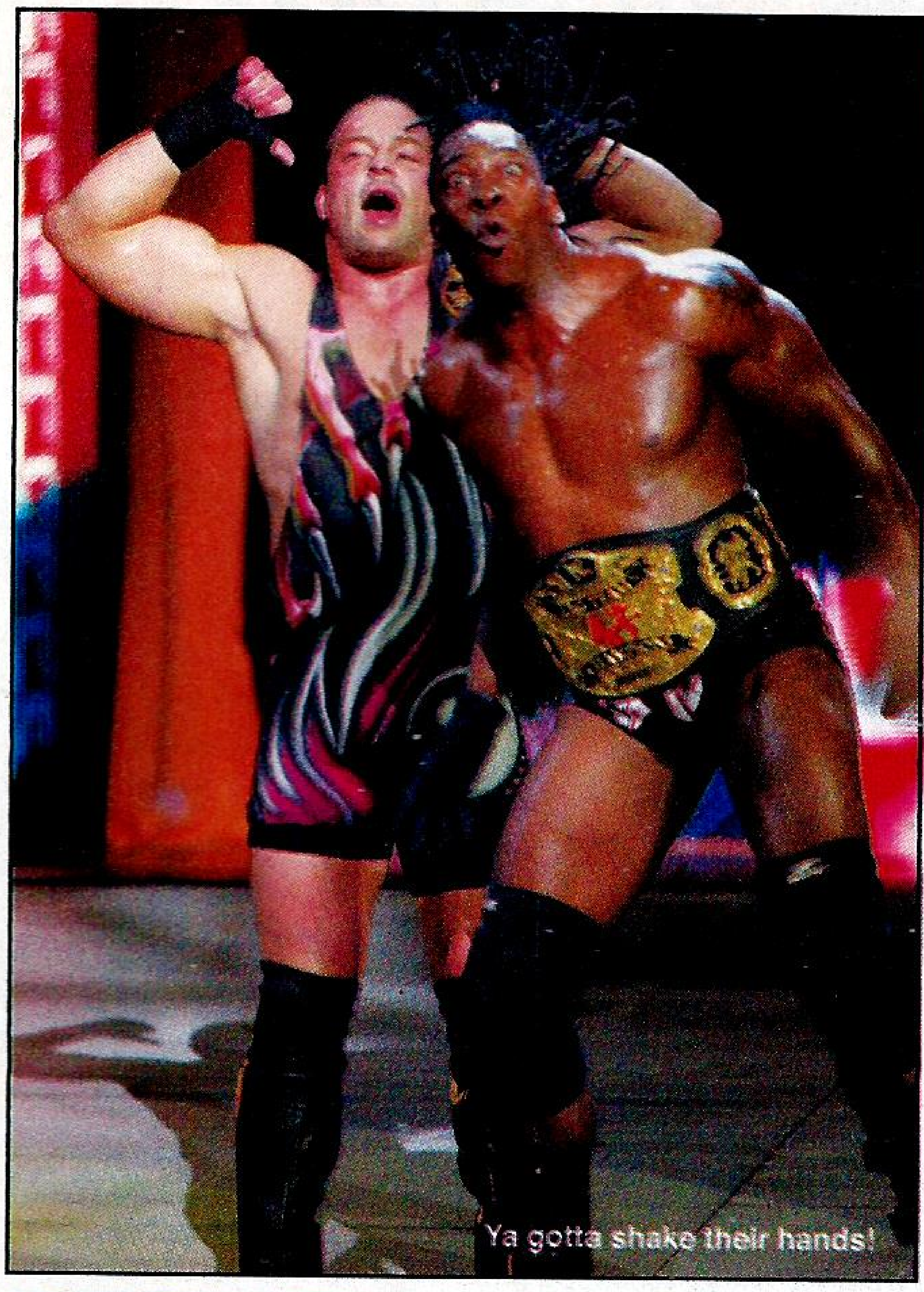
NO CHRISTIAN CHARITY. Christian's victory over Alberto Del Rio to capture the vacant World heavyweight title back in May was a lackluster event, considering it seemed like a giveaway to Christian after Edge's sudden retirement—and Edge himself had played such an active role in the match. But Christian's series of matches against Randy Orton have solidified his status as a tremendous in-ring performer.

WHO BOOKED THIS GUY? Why is Booker T so annoying these days? I've always been a big fan of Booker's in-ring work and his promo style. He's very entertaining. Yet someone who cuts a great promo doesn't necessarily make a good color commentator, which requires timing and analytical skills. Booker shouldn't be ashamed, though: Ric Flair and Randy Savage were sub-par at the announce table, too.

BUCKING LOCKERROOM ETIQUETTE. While I'm giving Booker a shellacking, let's touch upon the Bucks item. They were probably thinking, *Who am I to disturb Booker and shake his hand?* A wrestling lockerroom can be one of the most awkward places on the planet. Do I approach this big star at the risk of seeming cocky? Or do I stand in the corner at the risk of seeming aloof? Sometimes you can't win.

A HEALTHY RESPECT FOR THE BIZ. Photographer Tim Walker reports there was hardly a dry eye inside the National Guard Armory in Keyser, West Virginia, when Leslie Leatherman returned after a lengthy hospitalization and announced his retirement. West Virginia fans were well aware of his contributions, including 1,500 matches and 30 indy title reigns during his career. Tim, you can put down the Kleenex now.

Maryland Championship Wrestling's 11th Shane Shamrock Memorial Cup Tournament was held on July 30 at the New Green Room in Dundalk, Maryland, just outside of Baltimore. **Sami Callihan**, best known for his exploits in Combat Zone Wrestling, forced 2007 Cup winner **Josh Daniels** into submission to emerge victorious in the six-way elimination match to win the Cup. Callihan is on quite a streak,


Ya gotta shake their hands!

A Terri Runnels photo, minus the lawsuit

Photo by Stu Saks

winning major indy tournaments around the world this year, including the Jeff Peterson Cup in Florida and the 16-Carat Gold tournament in Germany.

In qualifying matches at the event, **Alex Colon** defeated **Corey Hollis** and **Judas Young** ... **Vordell Walker** beat **Nathan Crown** and **Kyle Matthews** ... **Ricky Reyes** defeated **Aden Chambers** and **Mike Posey** ... **Josh Daniels** beat **Oliver Grimsley** and **Alexander James** ... Callihan, who had earned an automatic spot in the tournament, defeated Daniels, Reyes, **Kirby Mack** (who had also received a bye), Walker, and Colon in the final. In non-tournament matches, MCW heavyweight champion **Cobian** defeated **The Bruiser** ... **Fed-Up** beat **The Holy Rollers** for the MCW tag team title, forcing them to retire due to a pre-match stipulation ... **Napalm Bomb** won a 20-man battle royal to win a future shot at the Rage TV strap ... Rage TV champion **Ronnie Zukko** beat **Nui Tofiga**.

For full coverage of the Shamrock Cup, check out my "Win, Lose, Or Draw" column in the November 2011 issue of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, now on sale.

News from Showtime All-Star Wrestling: SAW officials are unsure whether Kid Kash will follow **Crimson's** lead and vacate the International title in favor of his new TNA contract ... **Johnny Bandana** and **Cody Melton** beat **The Brotherhood** (Jeff Daniels and Josephus) for the SAW tag team belts when **Derrick King**, who was trying to cost Bandana and Melton the bout, inadvertently caused The Brotherhood to lose. Tensions between Derrick King Enterprises and The Brotherhood are building ... The newly popular **Chris Michaels** is feuding with former partner **Sean Casey**. The word is that the streetwise ladies in Casey's Freak Squad fear for their man's safety.

This 'n' that: Veteran **Leslie Leatherman** made an emotional return to the National Guard Armory in Keyser, West Virginia, revealing that health issues were forcing him to retire from the ring, but later accepted a position as the Elite Pro Wrestling Alliance's vice president of wrestling operations ... **Maryse** recently underwent abdominal hernia surgery ... **Richie Steamboat** had $1,703 worth of property stolen out of his car in Dilworth, North Carolina, according to NewsChannel 36 in Charlotte. Among the items were a Louis Vuitton purse and wallet. Please, Richie, tell us those belong to someone else.

From the Little She-Devil Dept.: At **Terri Runnels'** request, a judge in Sanford, Florida, has ordered **New Jack** to stop selling nude photos of her at various events. The only question is whether this will be a temporary or permanent ban. Terri and New Jack were a couple for a year-and-a-half.

In New Jack's defense, I am unsatisfied with this ruling. I demand to see the evidence!

That's all for now. Save a ringside seat for me. ☐

COLT CABANA

HEIGHT: 6'1"
WEIGHT: 233
HOMETOWN: Chicago, Illinois

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE: March 6, 2011—Cabana defeated his nemesis and then-NWA champion Adam Pearce in a bloody battle at an *NWA From Hollywood* TV taping. The victory was particularly satisfying for Cabana for two reasons: He joined an elite group of wrestlers who have held the famous "10 pounds of *gold," plus he took the title from a bitter* rival in Pearce.

HE DOES IT SO WELL: Cabana is surprisingly well versed in several wrestling styles, but his most impressive trait is his ability to surprise opponents. A stand-up comic and natural-born showman, it is not uncommon for foes to take him lightly. However, when things get serious, Cabana puts the fan interaction and comedy spots away.

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE: Cabana needs to get more serious about wrestling. As mentioned, he can wrestle with anybody, but at times it seems as if he needs to be pushed. Sometimes he goes too far out of his way to be funny. That NWA title might have come sooner if he'd taken a more serious approach to the sport.

PET FINISHER: "Billy Goat's Curse" inverted Boston crab, "Colt .45" double-underhook backbreaker drop

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: August 26, 2006. His two-out-of-three- falls match with then-ROH champion Bryan Danielson went to a 60-minute, time-limit draw, helping to establish Cabana as one of the mat game's finest technical wrestlers.

OUTLOOK: After CM Punk mentioned Cabana by name during his infamous late-June promo on *Raw*, some feel Cabana is now destined to return to WWE at some point. But until that call comes, it's safe to assume Cabana will stay busy in the NWA and a myriad other independent promotions.

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: "When me and Corino had our beef with Cabana in ROH, it was no joke. Yeah, he does his comedy bit, but you have to respect his ability. Otherwise you get beat."
—Kevin Steen

Photo by Jake Sposetta

data sheet

BRIAN KENDRICK

HEIGHT: 5'8"
WEIGHT: 184
HOMETOWN: Venice, California

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE: July 10, 2011—Kendrick found himself hoisted high atop the shoulders of his X division peers, having defeated Abyss to win his first X title at Destination X in Orlando, Florida. After facing an uphill battle in ROH and WWE, it seemed Kendrick's time had finally come in TNA.

HE DOES IT SO WELL: Kendrick wrestles all-out all the time. Despite being somewhat undersized—even for a cruiserweight—he never shows any fear or hesitation in the ring, even against a foe like Abyss, who is big and strong enough to ground the aerialist. Kendrick's high-flying fearlessness is reminiscent of a younger Rob Van Dam.

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE: He needs to add some muscle mass. As a member of TNA's X division, which now has a 225-pound weight limit, he is unlikely to face many heavyweights from now on. Still, Kendrick weighs just 184 pounds. An additional 10 to 15 pounds of muscle will steel him against the rigors of the high-impact X division. It will also benefit him on the rare occasion he has to face a heavyweight. However, Kendrick must be careful not to weigh down his frame with too much bulk, lest he impair his aerial ability.

PET FINISHER: Cobra Clutch with bodyscissors, Kendrick Sliced Bread

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: At Unforgiven 2008, Kendrick found himself competing for the WWE World title in a Championship Scramble match that also included Triple-H, Jeff Hardy, Shelton Benjamin, and MVP. Kendrick held his own against Benjamin and MVP, but was clearly overmatched against Triple-H and Hardy. Kendrick's only world championship singles match in WWE ended when Triple-H executed a Pedigree and pinfall on him to win the title.

OUTLOOK: While talented and hardworking, there's really little opportunity for Kendrick to grow beyond his current spot as X division champ. Given his tag team wrestling experience, a TNA tag title reign is a possibility.

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: "Kendrick is a gifted wrestler that can do some truly special things in the ring. I guess that's why he reminds me of me sometimes."
—Christopher Daniels

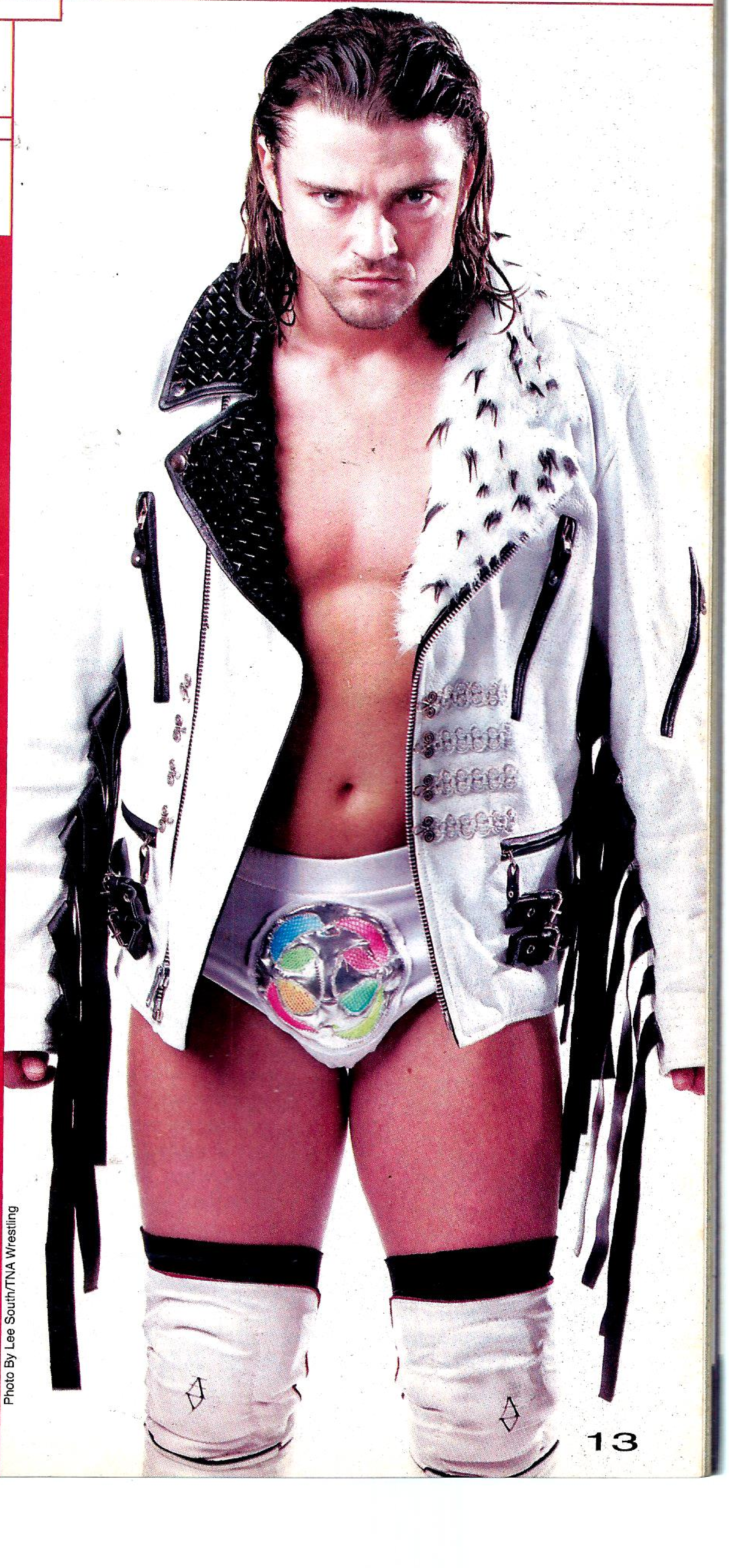


Photo By Lee South/TNA Wrestling

on the road

With Dave Lenker

SOMETIMES, DESPITE your best efforts, you can't help but get sucked in by the sappy, sentimental story. Sometimes you can't help but pull for the good guy, even if in this case, the good guy is the bad girl.

You may have noticed that lovely but wicked three-time former TNA Knockouts champ Madison Rayne has been sporting some sexy United States Air Force-inspired ring gear of late. You probably don't know the backstory. No, Rayne didn't study at the Mick Foley school of cheap pops. She's not after the easy patriotic reaction. In fact, she was nervous when she first unveiled the outfit backstage, though she has enough playful swagger about her that she told me jokingly, "I can wear a brown paper bag and still be this character."

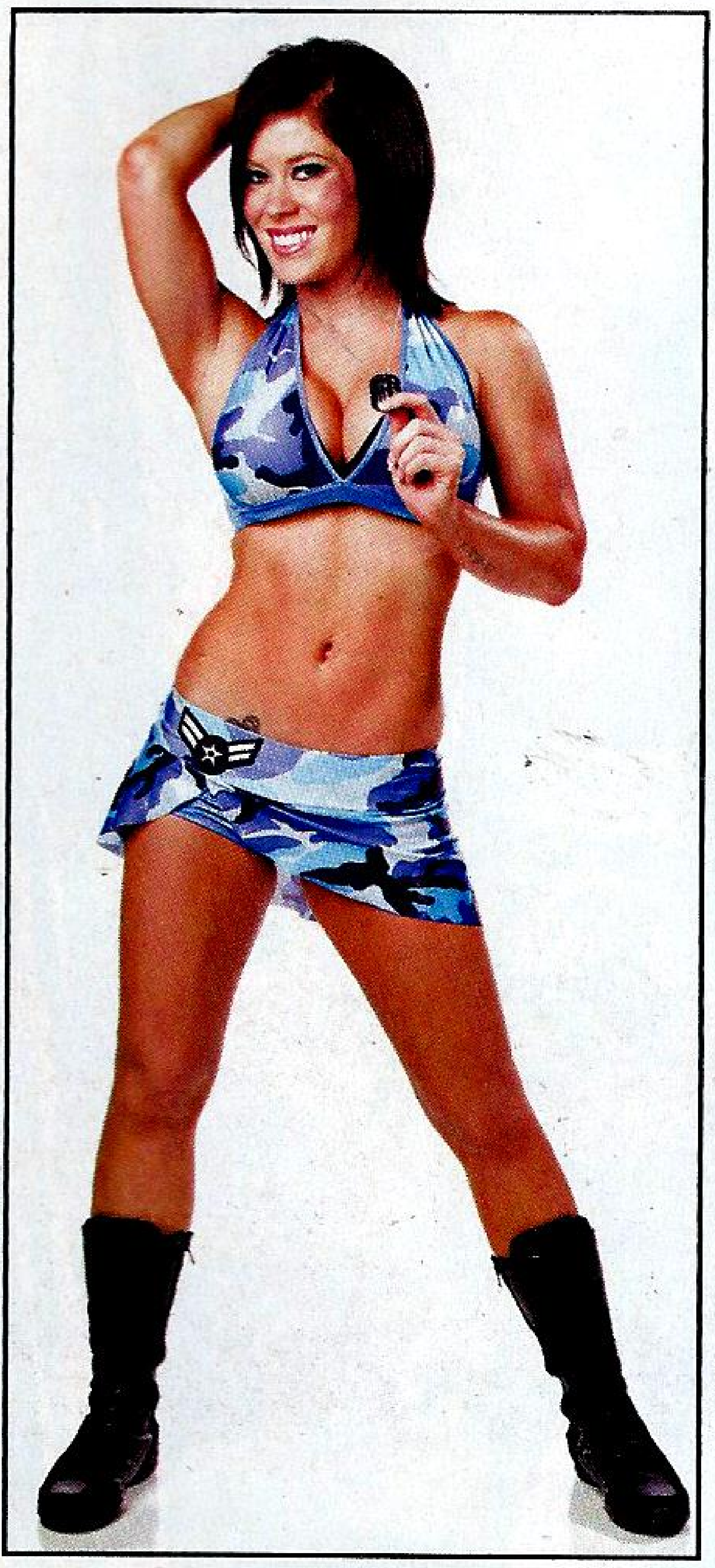


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

To honor members of the U.S. Military—which includes her husband, Jesse, and several relatives—TNA's Madison Rayne has begin wearing Air Force-themed ring gear for her matches.

Fear not, the backstory isn't that sappy or sentimental. It's more feel-kinda-bad-but-then feel-good, so I am glad I sought out Madison and got her to tell it.

"I did it for everybody," she said of her new gear, pointing to the many in her extended family who have proudly served this country—her grandfather, who served in the Navy during World War II, her Army veteran father, and a cousin who has served in the Marines and the Army and has seen multiple tours of Iraq. But it's her husband of less than a year, Jesse, who is her number-one inspiration.

On the late-summer night during which I spoke to her for the better part of an hour, Jesse was close to wrapping up six weeks of Air Force training in Texas in preparation for a six-month deployment in Afghanistan, and she was getting ready to travel to the Lone Star State to spend a few days with him—the last few days she would get to spend with him until he returns to the States half a year from now. Tough times were awaiting him, and some very trying and lonely days and nights await her, but she was amazingly upbeat.

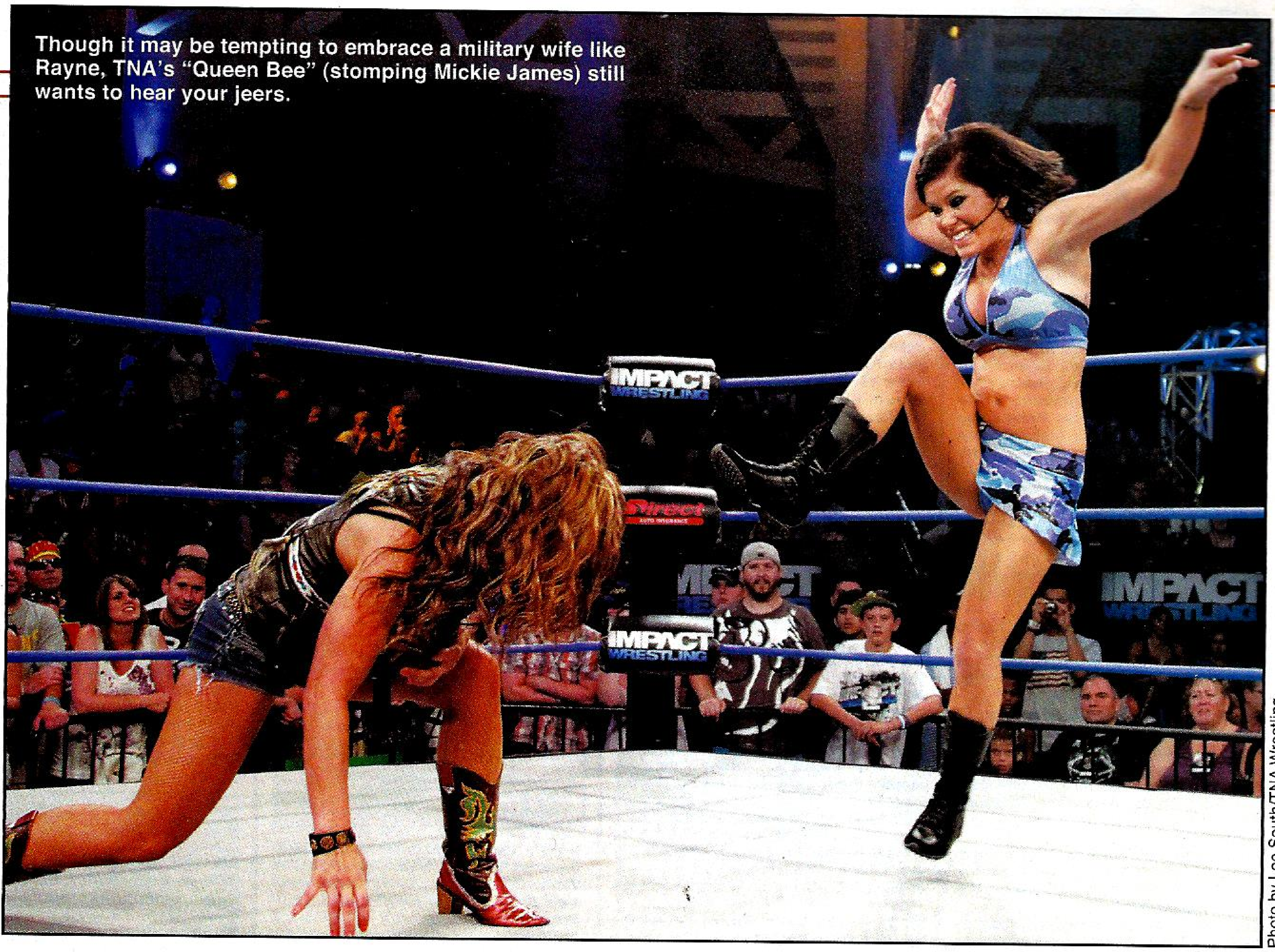
It'll be a rough six months, but she's as ready as can be.

"I don't think just anybody is cut out to be a military wife," she said. True, that must be hard enough, and she's only had six months plus to adjust to the life. Already it has been quite the rollercoaster ride. She moved from her native Ohio to a military town in South Carolina when they were married and has moved back for the time being. She has dealt with all the adjustments any new wife must endure, and all the while has had to keep being mean, nasty, bitchy Madison Rayne for our enjoyment. (I don't think she'd mind me revealing to anyone that once the bright lights are turned off, she seems like a tremendously nice person.)

Now ... Afghanistan.

Of course, it will help them and their young marriage that this will be Jesse's second deployment overseas. He was gone from May to November last year, too, but they weren't married then—weren't even sure marriage was in the plans—and to this day, she doesn't know exactly where he was. Call it a different spin on don't-ask-don't-tell. Better to allow him to talk about it when he wants and not fire off too many questions.

The sappy part of their story rises to the surface when you go back and find out that Madison's future mother-in-law learned she was going to marry Jesse before even Jesse had the slightest inkling. "I just want you to know I'm going to marry your son one day," she marched up and told Jesse's mom. Whatta ya know, but a short decade-and-a-half later, the vows were exchanged. See, they both had to get through middle school and high school first, so Jesse's mom probably didn't think the nine-year-old girl's words were necessarily prophetic



Though it may be tempting to embrace a military wife like Rayne, TNA's "Queen Bee" (stomping Mickie James) still wants to hear your jeers.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

at the time. Their families were quite close as Jesse and Madison grew up together in West Lafayette, Ohio. "It's insane how well we know each other," she laughs.

They were married in February (during the busiest part of her TNA schedule, no less), and Jesse had been home but three days in mid-June after a four-week stint training in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates when he received word that he was soon to be bound for Afghanistan. Knowing their time together was suddenly limited, Rayne had to cancel a personal appearance on short notice so she could be with him.

She can't say enough about how supportive everyone in TNA has been during the past few months. Family, friends, faith in God, and even all those fans who despise TNA's "Queen Bee" have helped her get through the hard times and will continue to do so. Some of those fans are in the military, and even a few fellow military wives have pledged their support. Many follow her "constant" tweets.

It won't hurt that we are, as she noted, many generations removed from World War II, when military wives waited by mailboxes for news and the next letter to arrive. There's e-mail, there's Skype, "and the iPhone," she notes, "is an ingenious invention." They will communicate whenever and however they can. Meanwhile, she'll try to limit her CNN viewing and thus her worrying. "Jesse asked me to please don't watch the news," she says, "but I'd be foolish to think I'm not going to see what's happening there."

Getting to lose herself in storylines for a few days here and there will allow her to escape, too, so go right on booing her. It's oddly therapeutic. Consider it your strange civic duty.

Not getting to spend Christmas with Jesse will be agonizing, she acknowledges, as will his not being around for their first anniversary, but the work he does is so important not just for the country, but for his future and theirs together. He has more than three years to go on his current Air Force commitment, and because "nothing is ever set in stone with Jesse," when he's ready to make his next career move, he might just decide to become a career military man, in which case these long stretches apart could become regular events. Or, he might pursue his long-term goal of becoming a physical therapist, or he could do something altogether different.

"I just know that when he comes home and it's all behind him, he's going to have something he can look back on and be really, really proud," she said.

At the risk of sounding sappy, we should all be proud of Jesse and the thousands and thousands like him who do so much for us. □

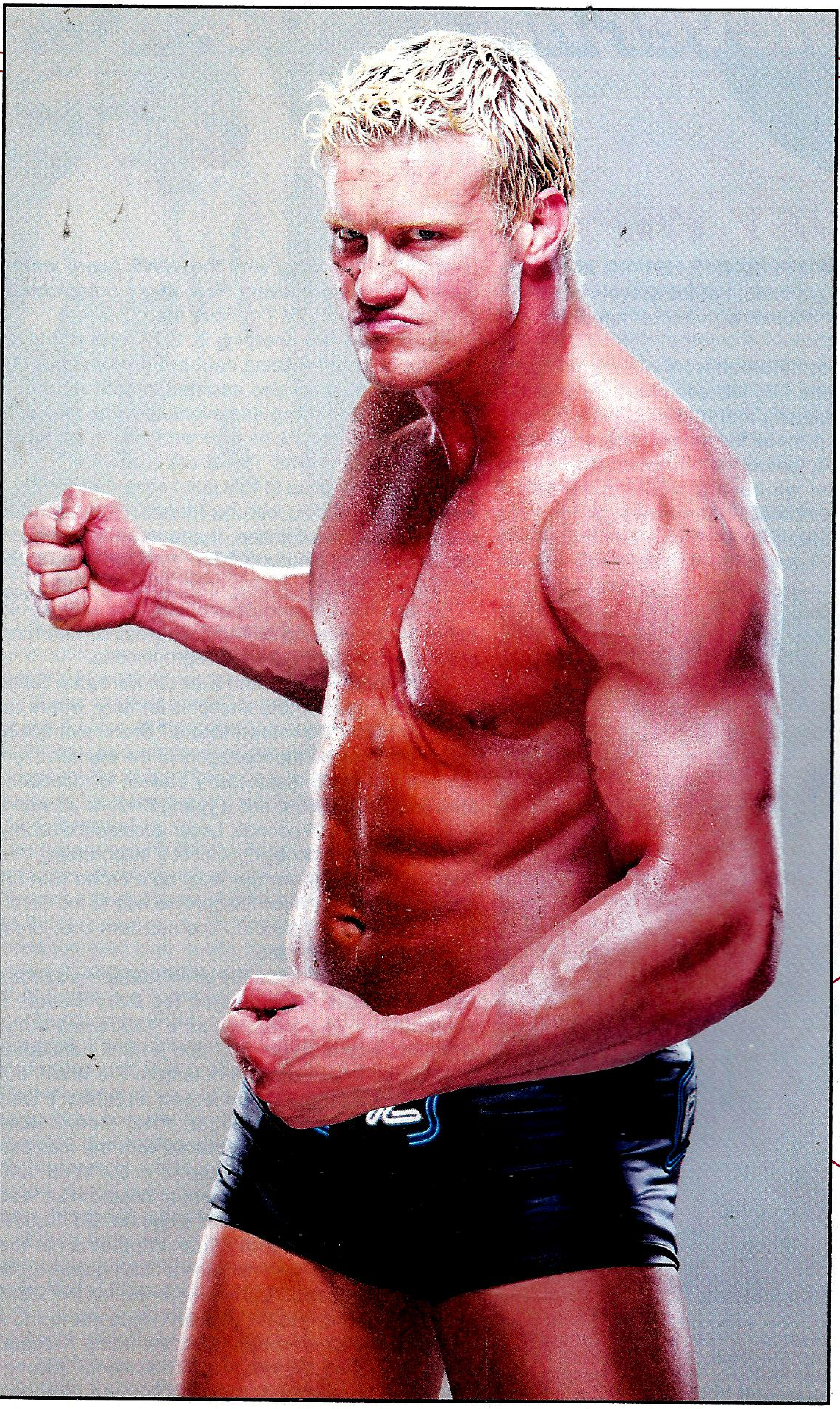
capsule profile 363

DOLPH ZIGGLER

BORN IN CLEVELAND, OHIO, on July 27, 1980 ... Was 12 when he decided he wanted to be a pro wrestler ... Attended St. Edward High School in Lakewood, Ohio, where he was the star of the wrestling team, establishing a school record for most pins with 82 ... Member of two national championship teams ... Wrestled at Kent State University ... Racked up a then-school record 120 wins between 2000 and 2003 ... Three-time All-Mid-American Conference champion at 165 pounds ... Signed developmental contract with WWE in 2004 and was assigned to Ohio Valley Wrestling ... Debuted under his real name, Nick Nemeth ... Feuded with Paul Birchill ... Unsuccessfully challenged Ken Doane for the OVW TV title ... Made WWE debut on *Sunday Night Heat* in September 2005 as Kerwin White's (Chavo Guerrero Jr.'s) "caddy" ... Teamed with Guerrero in win over Shelton Benjamin and Matt Striker ... Soon returned to OVW for more seasoning ... In late-2005, as "Nicky," formed the Spirit Squad with Ken Doane, Johnny Jeter, Nick Mitchell, and Mike Mondo ... Contingent made *Raw* debut in January 2006 ... Distracted Jerry "The King" Lawler, helping Jonathan Coachman win a Royal Rumble qualifying match ... Spirit Squad was soon recruited by WWE Chairman Vince McMahon as henchmen during his feud with Shawn Michaels ... After Kenny and Mikey defeated The Big Show and Kane for the WWE World tag team title, all five members of the Squad were recognized as champions ... Helped shatter Michaels' knee ... Triple-H made the save, leading to a one-sided feud between DeGeneration-X and the Spirit Squad ... Squad disbanded after losing to D-X and Ric Flair in a five-on-three handicap match on *Raw* in late-2006 ... Later, D-X placed all members of the group into a crate stamped "OVW, Louisville, Kentucky" ... Upon returning to OVW, formed occasional team with Mike Mondo known as The Frat Pack ... Was reassigned to WWE's new developmental territory, Florida Championship Wrestling, and defeated Hade Vansen in FCW debut ... Began teaming with Brad Allen in another frat boy-themed tag team ... Won the FCW Florida tag team title from Eddie Colon and Eric Perez, but lost it back to them less than a month later ... Enjoyed another reign with Gavin Spears, before dropping the belts to Heath Miller and Joe Hennig ... Returned to Raw in September 2008 with a new image ... Walked around backstage for weeks, shaking hands and introducing himself as "Dolph Ziggler" ... Less than a month later, was suspended for 30 days for violation of WWE's Wellness Program ... Lost to Batista in first match back, but earned high marks for a spirited effort ... Pinned Charlie Haas two weeks later ... Moved to Smackdown in the 2009 supplemental draft ... Was unsuccessful in Intercontinental title matches against champion Rey Mysterio Jr. at Night of Champions and SummerSlam ... Competed in Money in the Bank ladder match at WrestleMania 26 ... Formed "business partnership" with Vickie Guerrero ... Won first singles championship when he defeated Kofi Kingston for the I-C title on *Smackdown* ... Retained title in matches against MVP and Kaval ... Earned Guerrero's ire by flirting with Kaitlyn ... Served as a Pro on *NXT Season 4*, mentoring both Jacob Novak and Byron Saxton ... Lost I-C title to Kingston after a five-month reign ... Lost to World champion Edge at Royal Rumble ... Acting GM Guerrero overturned the loss, noting that Edge had won with a spear, which she had previously outlawed ... Lost title the same night when Smackdown GM Theodore Long returned and granted Edge an immediate rematch ... Title "win" was not recognized by INSIDE WRESTLING ... Subsequently fired by Long ... Less than a month later, showed up with Guerrero on *Raw* ... Teamed with Lay-Cool in mixed tag loss to John Morrison, Trish Stratus, and Snookie at WrestleMania 27 ... Beat Kingston for the U.S. title at Capital Punishment.

Photo by George Napolitano

Though Ziggler dropped the Intercontinental title to Kofi Kingston, he avenged the loss by taking Kofi's U.S. title. Their matches are extremely competitive even without a title on the line.



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DOLPH ZIGGLER

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whatever happened to...

By Dan Murphy

HARVEY WIPPLEMAN

HARVEY WIPPLEMAN STEPPED away from managing in 1995, but the gravel-voiced former WWF Women's champion never stepped away from WWE.

Bruno Lauer continues to work with the company in a backstage role. "My job is to take care of all the details, from arranging and returning rental cars to making sure we have all the materials we need for a show. If there's a ladder match scheduled, I'm the guy making sure we have a ladder there for it," Lauer said in a recent phone interview from his home in Walls, Mississippi, about 15 minutes away from Memphis, where he cut his teeth as Downtown Bruno. "I'm traveling with the WWE every week: every pay-per-view, every *Raw*, every *Smackdown*, anything that's on TV, I'm there for it."

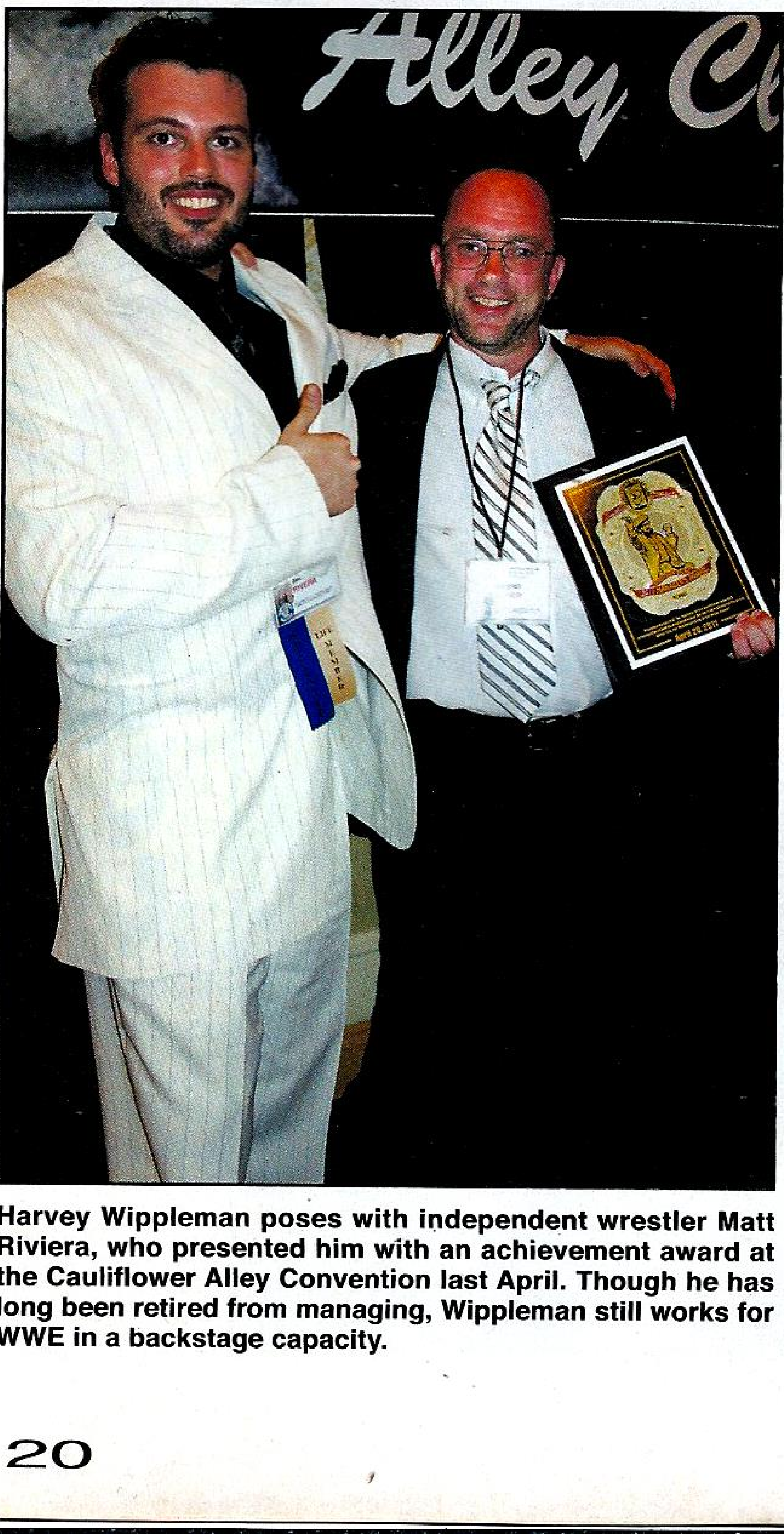


Photo by Mike Lano

Harvey Wippleman poses with independent wrestler Matt Riviera, who presented him with an achievement award at the Cauliflower Alley Convention last April. Though he has long been retired from managing, Wippleman still works for WWE in a backstage capacity.

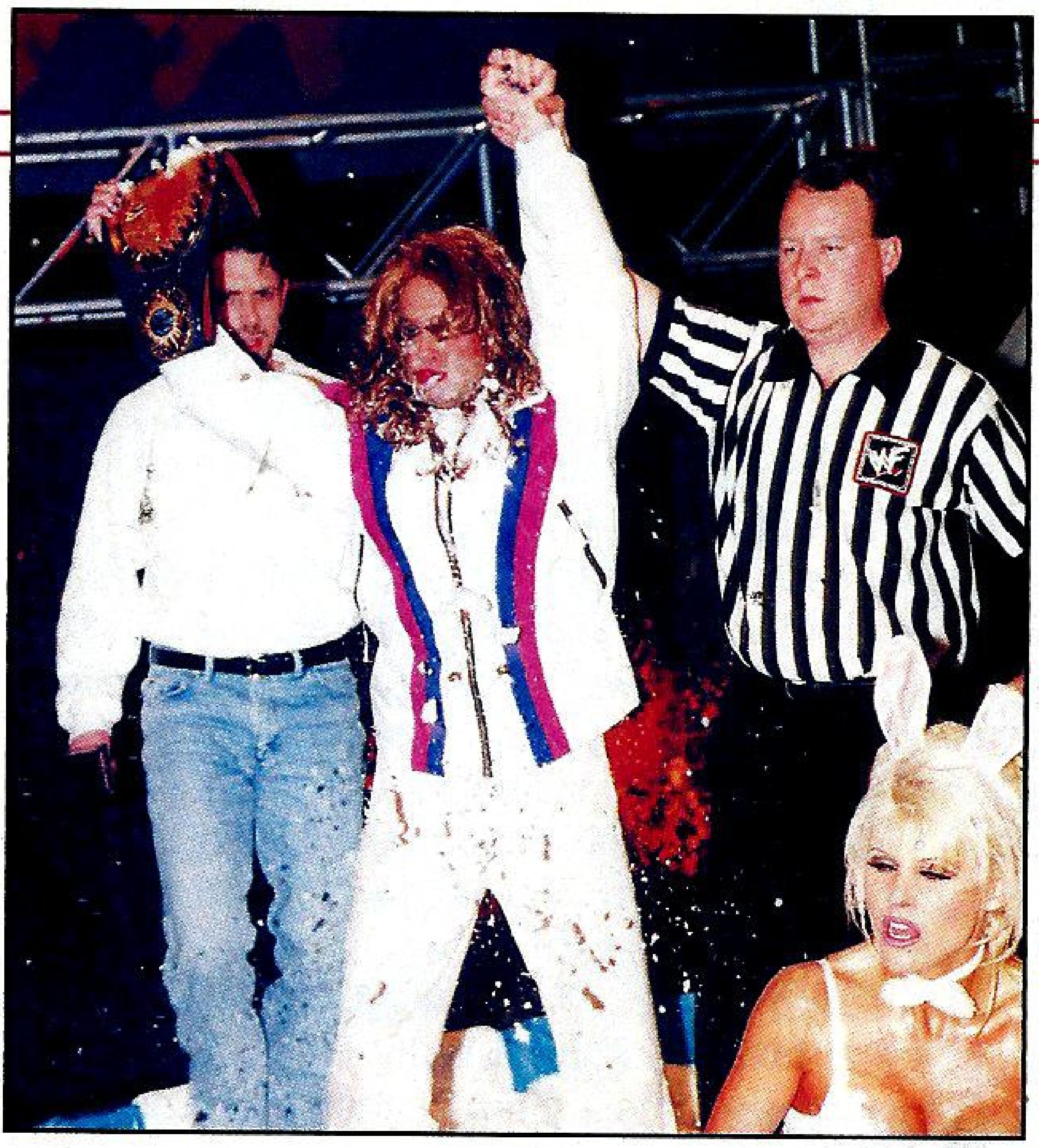
Lauer broke into wrestling in 1979 after attending an independent wrestling card in Pennsylvania. He joined the ring crew and assisted in setting up and breaking down the ring and eventually was offered a spot as a manager. As he later wrote in his autobiography *Wrestling With The Truth* (Crowbar Press, 2008), his resume up to that point consisted of sitting on the hoods of cars with his friends, smoking cigarettes, throwing a Frisbee, trying to convince older kids to buy them a quart of beer. "I was on a fast track to nowhere with a non-stop ticket," Lauer wrote.

Dubbed "Dr. Lennerd Spazzinsky," the 14-year-old Lauer began working at ringside, gradually learning the ins and outs of the wrestling business.

After a tour of Hawaii and a stint in Kentucky, Lauer eventually settled in the Memphis territory, where he took the name "Downtown Bruno." Bruno eventually became one of the top managers of the Memphis territory, working alongside Jerry Lawler, Bill Dundee, Mick Foley, Jeff Jarrett, and a young Dwayne Johnson. At just 5'7" and 155 pounds, Lauer adopted the Jimmy Hart approach to managing, that of a tough-talking little man who could masterfully work up a crowd with his weaselly ways. He even finagled his way to the Continental Wrestling Federation Southeastern U.S. junior heavyweight title in 1988.

In 1991, Lauer joined the WWF, debuting as Harvey Wippleman. He managed Big Bully Busick, a powerhouse who wrestled as a 1930s-era bully, complete with a bowler hat and a thick handlebar mustache. Busick didn't last long in the WWF, but Wippleman was making an impact as Busick's fast-talking, obnoxious manager. After Busick was released, Wippleman was paired with the massive Warlord. Warlord also floundered in the WWF and was eventually released, while Wippleman was paired with his fellow Memphis alumnus, Sid Justice.

The pairing with Justice took Wippleman to the main-event scene, culminating in a clash between Sid and Hulk Hogan at WrestleMania 7. Sid left the WWF a short time later, and Wippleman began managing a string of mid-card competitors, including Kamala, Giant Gonzales, Mr. Hughes, Adam Bomb, Kwang, Well Dunn, Bertha Faye, and The Brooklyn Brawler.



"Harvina" made WWF history in 2000 when he defeated Stacy Carter in a "Lumberjill Snow Bunny" match to become the first male to win the WWF Women's championship. Wippleman takes full credit for coming up with the idea.

Today, Lauer says he enjoyed each phase of his managing career, and that he cannot pick one single era or wrestler he managed as his favorite.

"It was all great to me," he said. "It never mattered to me if I was at the top of the card or the opener. I have zero ego whatsoever. As long as I've got a job, I'm happy. I just want to make a living and come back home to Mississippi every week, and then go out and do it all again."

After managing Bertha Faye to the WWF Women's title, Wippleman had a feud with ring announcer Howard Finkel. He also had a brief run as a referee. In 2000, Lauer made history by becoming the first male wrestler ever to win the WWF Women's title, dressing in drag as "Harvina" and beating Stacy "The Kat" Carter in a "Lumberjill Snow Bunny" match.

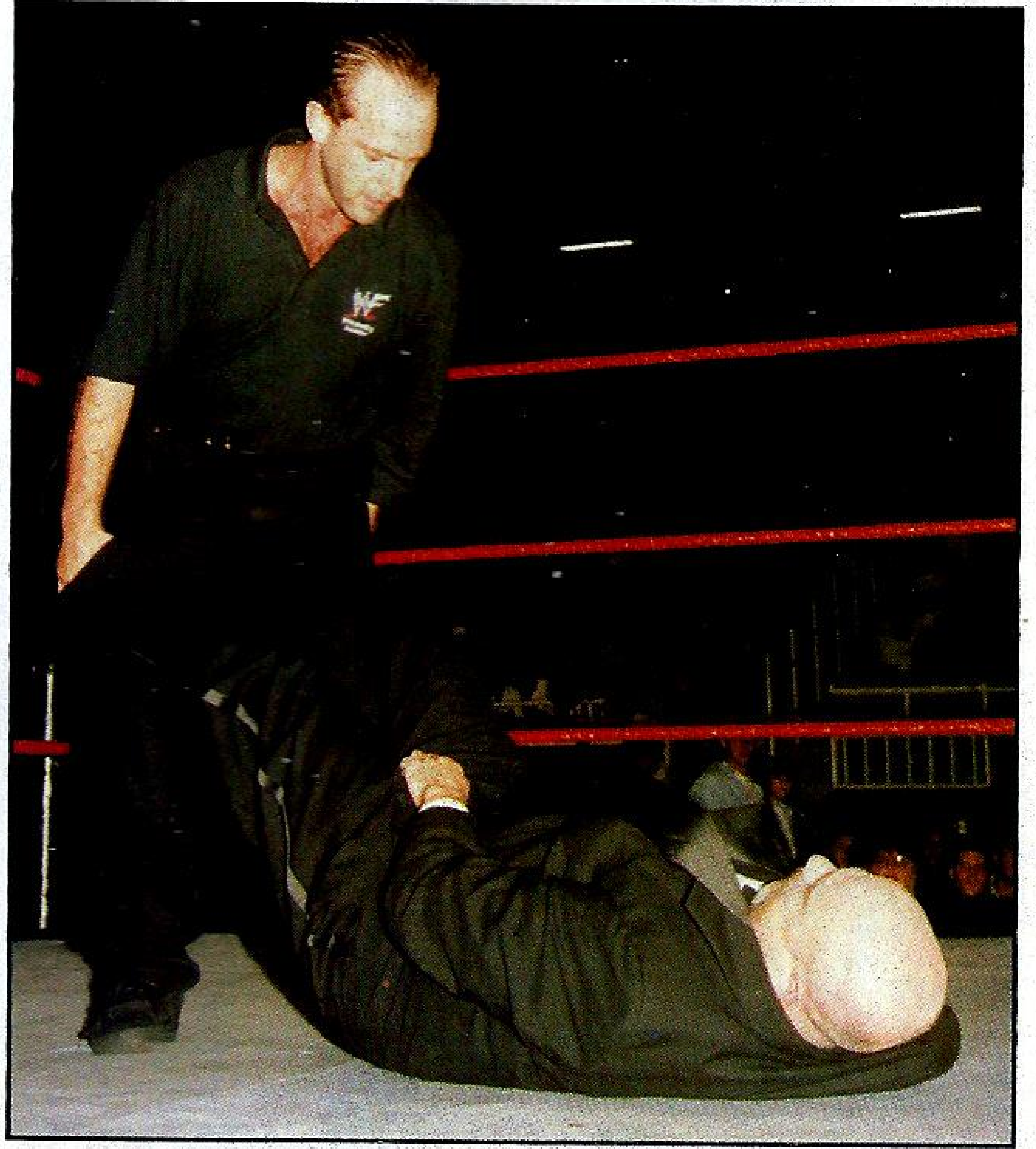
"That was my idea, 100 percent," Lauer said. "At the time, I was still working in Memphis Power Pro Wrestling with Randy Hales. I was working Stacy Carter a lot and we were having decent matches. I suggested I wrestle her in the WWF. Of course, they decided that match should be a 'Lumberjill Snow Bunny' match, which might have gone down as the worst match ever, but we did it as a comic relief-type thing, and it worked."

When he's not on the road with WWE, Lauer enjoys working on his property and maintaining his vehicles in Mississippi. "I built a nice home here, and I like to take care of my place," he said. Lauer also remains active as a senior official in the Arkansas-based New Experience Wrestling. He said he usually appears for the promotion every Friday night, serving as a referee or announcer. There, he freely offers words of wisdom to younger wrestlers who want to pick the brain of a man with a 30-plus-year wrestling career, including a 20-year run in WWE.

"With WWE, they have producers and agents who give advice to the wrestlers, and I don't want to step on anyone's toes or anything like that," Lauer said. "The guys in NEW, those are the guys I work with and try to help, maybe try to help open doors for them with WWE."

As for writing his autobiography, Lauer said the experience was surprisingly simple. "It wasn't fiction, so I didn't have to come up with a story or anything. I just had to sit down and remember a lot of things, and just be honest. It was a great experience," he said.

Harvey Wippleman made a special appearance on WWE's "Old School *Raw*" in November 2010, managing The Brooklyn Brawler in a loss to Ezekiel Jackson. Lauer was recently honored by the Cauliflower Alley Club and received the organization's Manager Award in April 2011. ☐



Wippleman sends WWF ring announcer Howard Finkel to the mat during their brief feud. Today, Bruno Lauer serves as ring announcer, referee, and wrestling mentor in Arkansas' New Experience Wrestling promotion.

plain speaking

With Matt Brock

Harder than nails, veteran wrestling reporter Matt Brock has logged more miles covering wrestling than any other journalist. Every month Matt will travel to the sport's hotbeds, reporting everything he sees without fear or favor

ORLANDO, FL: A generation or so ago, guys like Lex Luger and Bam Bam Bigelow would growl at some folks on our staff because they were pretty quick to fasten the "underachiever" tag to them. ¶Maybe that was unfair. Success in wrestling is so much more difficult to define than it is in football or baseball. Still, I wonder if we'll be tempted to hang that on Mr. Anderson when he's through. Anderson was a bit of a late bloomer, and following an abrupt end to a WWE career that once looked so promising, he reached the pinnacle in TNA by winning the World title twice in 2011. Bad news is those reigns lasted less than two months total. Now it seems like he's sliding back to the upper-middle of the pack (maybe even lower than that) in TNA as Kurt Angle again ascends to the top. ¶I'm not saying Anderson's feud with Bully Ray hasn't been interesting, as they had a nice old-school kind of brawl here at Hardcore Justice. It's just that Anderson seems a little sluggish lately, with fans not sure as to his motives, not quite as responsive to him as they once were. ¶A low blow by Ray sealed what I would consider a mild upset loss for him. Ray has done far better since the split from Brother Devon than I anticipated, but I feel like Anderson should be higher on the TNA food chain. ¶Of course, the same could be said for AJ Styles since we ranked him number one in last year's "*PWI* 500." The next year will be telling for Anderson if he's to avoid the underachiever label.

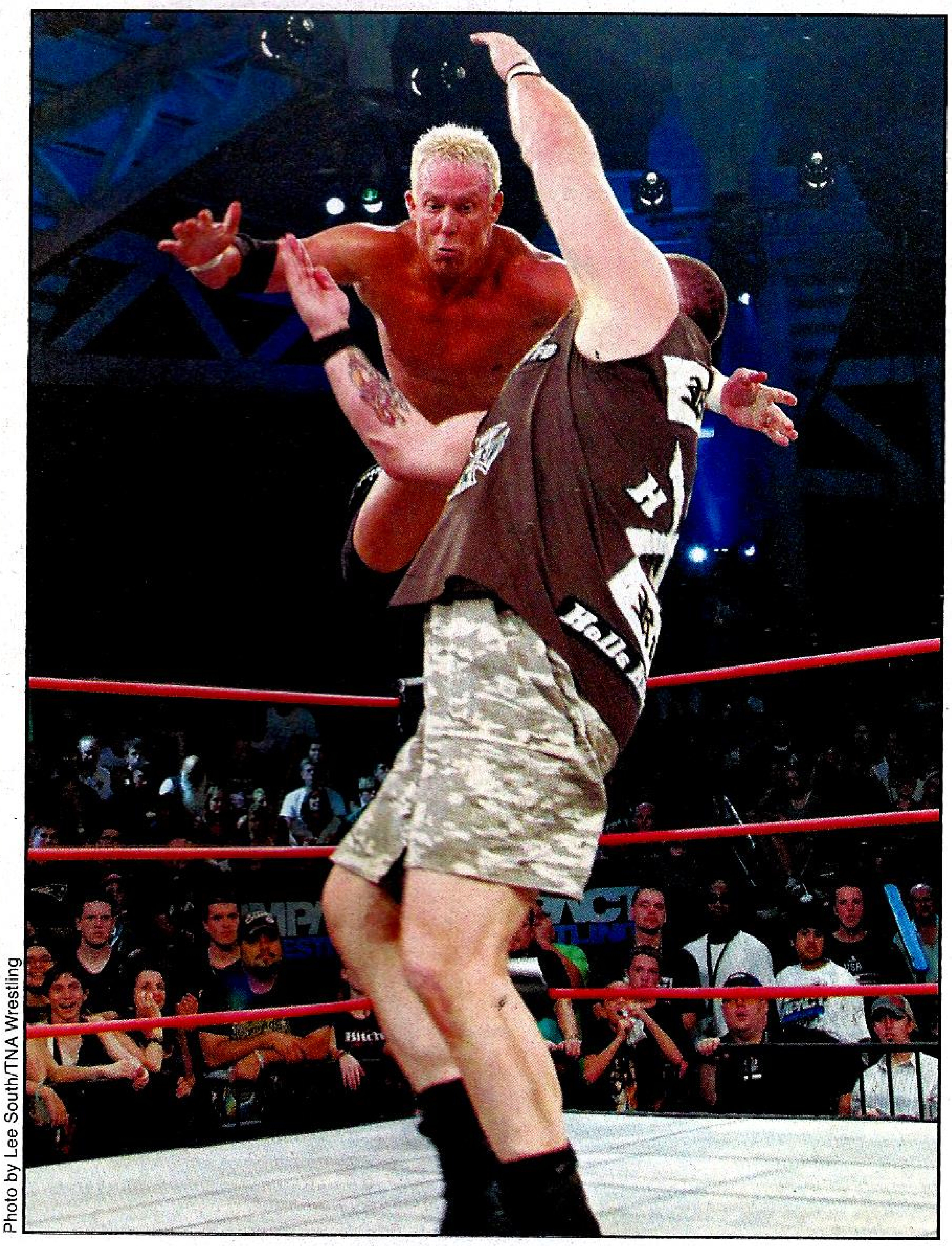


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

ANDERSON UNDERACHIEVING AT HARDCORE JUSTICE

CAVE-IN-ROCK, IL: Not sure I have it in me to do three big cards in three cities in a single long weekend anymore, but I tried. Check that. I'm now sure I don't. ¶Anyhow, my old friend Bill Apter invited me to take in this Juggalo Championship Wrestling Legends and Icons Internet pay-per-view deal. Bill was handling backstage interviews, but even he couldn't explain to me what or who a Juggalo is. ¶Well, I can't remember a legends event quite like this. This show took you back to a lot of different eras and a lot of different territories in the span of a few hours. Bob Backlund vs. Ken

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BARRETT OUTWRESTLES BRYAN AT SUMMERSLAM

Patera from the early-1980s WWF. Tito Santana vs. Greg Valentine from a few years later. Midnight Express vs. Rock 'n' Roll Express from a bunch of places in the 1980s. An odd eight-way "ECW Madness" match. An old Memphis five-way featuring the likes of Brickhouse Brown and Dutch Mantel and won somehow by Austin Idol. Plus you got NWO vs. D-X when Kevin Nash and X-Pac (with Scott Hall) took on The New Age Outlaws. And the main event pitted Roddy Piper against Terry Funk, which looked and felt forced. All in 2011? That one somehow turned into Piper and Bob Orton Jr. vs. Funk and Mick Foley. All involved can still work the mike with anybody, but their four bodies, sadly, can only do so much at this stage. You know the action overall couldn't have been too good if NWO vs. D-X is the best match on any show in 2011. ¶Great to see Backlund still in great shape nearly a full 30 years after his WWF title run ended. He beat Patera and couldn't resist applying his crossface chicken wing to a supposed fan after the match. Wonder if ol' Bob knows what a Juggalo is. I bet he can spell it at least.

CHICAGO, IL: Close to five hours worth of Ring of Honor TV tapings wasn't what I needed one night after my first and possibly only Juggalo experience and less than 24 hours before SummerSlam on the left coast, but there I was for the duration. ¶Sticking around proved to be worth my while, as I was treated to the expected classic between Charlie Haas and Shelton Benjamin and The Kings of Wrestling, a new TV champ being crowned in the person of Jay Lethal, and a thrilling ROH title match between Davey Richards and Roderick Strong. Crowd got pumped up by the return of Nigel McGuinness (Desmond Wolfe) from TNA. McGuinness was handling color commentary for new owners Sinclair Broadcasting, but nearly had to get physical, and helped Eddie Edwards run off Michael Elgin and Roderick Strong. ¶Been seeing a bit of a parade of guys returning to ROH after successful or not-so-successful stints in TNA, Lethal and McGuinness being the latest. McGuinness must have had such high hopes there after starting out with a great series against Kurt Angle, but things fizzled from there. I'm sure it's somewhat disappointing to take what some must think is a big step back to ROH, but paychecks aside, I'm not sure they see it that way. The gleam in their eyes seems to be back, and that's good to see.

LOS ANGELES, CA: Leg three of this seemingly endless three-shows-in-three-days weekend got me to La-La Land about two hours before SummerSlam started, and to say I was underwhelmed by the lineup on paper tells you a little bit about my jetlagged state of being and a lot more about the quality of the lineup on paper. ¶Christian vs. Randy Orton was no-DQ and had more than its share of guts and brutality. Orton snagged the World title back with another one of his out-of-nowhere RKOs onto the ring steps. ¶CM Punk vs. John Cena rightfully got the main-event slot and will continue to garner most of the headlines now that Alberto Del Rio, Kevin Nash, and Triple-H are all involved. But to me, Wade Barrett vs. Daniel Bryan might have been the best wrestling display on the card. ¶Barrett pulled out the kicks and punches, sure, but the lanky Brit also wrestled well when he had to. And against a master like Bryan, you can bet he had to. It was a dead-even match, with both men trading the momentum, but as they say, you can't teach size, and Barrett's was too much for Bryan to overcome. Hope this feud isn't over yet. ¶Also enjoying the old-school approach I'm seeing from Mark Henry now. Handed a countout loss to Sheamus on the undercard, putting him close to the front of the line for a World title shot. I wouldn't be surprised to see him holding that gold before we get to 2012. ¶As for me, I'm in search of a Rip Van Winkle-like siesta. Wake me up for Survivor Series. □

SPECIAL SECTION:

THE PRO WRESTLING RECORDS THAT WON'T BE BROKEN

Section Compiled By Tim Drake

THERE'S LIKELY NEVER been a wrestler or wrestling promoter who hasn't dreamed of setting a record that will last forever. Given this reality, the staff of *Inside Wrestling* wanted to find out who in the history of professional wrestling has actually managed to realize this dream. Are there any unbreakable records in wrestling, and if so, what are they?

Our first task was to assemble a comprehensive list of all current wrestling records. As we assessed each record to determine if it is indeed unbreakable, several questions repeatedly came up. For how long has the record stood? Has it ever come close to being broken, and if so, how recently?

We soon concluded that several of the most impressive records—Ric Flair's 16 world heavyweight title reigns, Steve Austin's three Royal Rumble victories, Rey Mysterio Jr.'s 62 minutes 12 seconds in the 2006 Royal Rumble, the 1.2 million pay-per-view buys for WrestleMania 23—will likely be broken at some point, perhaps even in the next few years. There were, however, 10 records that, after careful consideration, we deemed to be truly unbreakable.

Throughout the long process that resulted in the creation of our list, a chief priority was to separate fact from myth. Thus, we have not included the 15-year undefeated streak so often attributed to Andre the Giant, and that's because, despite the claims that have been frequently made by WWF/WWE commentators and officials, the "Eighth Wonder Of The World" was beaten a few times in the years prior to his famous loss to Hulk Hogan at WrestleMania 3 in 1987. Bruno Sammartino selling out Madison Square Garden for 78 consecutive months is another myth still sometimes mistakenly treated as fact.

Two of the records we ultimately selected for our list deal with world heavyweight championships. Over the course of the sport's history, there have been points at which a great many wrestlers from a great many promotions all claimed to be a world champion. For example, Montreal for years had its own world champion, as did Boston, Amarillo, and Omaha. We have counted as legitimate world heavyweight championships only those titles that have been recognized as such in the pages of our family of magazines.

The insights and research of Dave Meltzer, editor of *The Wrestling Observer Newsletter*, and Tim Hornbaker, author of *The National Wrestling Alliance: The Untold Story Of The Monopoly That Strangled Pro Wrestling*, proved invaluable in the completion of this section. The information on television ratings comes from the Nielsen Company.

TEAM 3-D'S 5 WORLD AND 24 TOTAL TAG TITLES

THE RECORDS THAT WON'T BE BROKEN

You can beat Brother Devon and Bully Ray with chairs, bang their faces into wire fencing, or hit them with barbed-wire. But in one way they will never be touched. Nobody will ever hold as many prestigious titles in as many prestigious wrestling organizations.

The journey of the most decorated tag team in the history of wrestling began in the ECW Arena in early-1997 when Bubba Ray and D-Von Dudley first joined forces. On March 15, 1997, they won their first ECW tag team title, downing The Eliminators. They went on to have bloody feuds with all the best teams in ECW, including New Jack and Mustafa Saed, Tommy Dreamer and The Sandman, and Sabu and Rob Van Dam. No tag team had ever been as dominant in ECW as the table-breaking Dudleys. Each time they suffered a defeat, they would invariably come back more ferocious and more committed than ever. By the time they left ECW in August 1999, they had won the tag team championship eight times.

The Dudleys moved on to the WWF, where their hardcore style made them an instant sensation. They captured their first WWF World tag team championship on February 27, 2000, from The New Age Outlaws, who had been the top team of the late-1990s. The Dudleys next began their legendary year-long feud with The Hardy Boyz and Edge and Christian, a feud in which they won the WWF tag team title two more times. 2001 was the year of the WCW-ECW invasion of the WWF, and, as members of the invading Alliance, the Dudleys beat the Hardys for the WCW tag team title on October 23, 2001. Just over a month later, on November 18, they unified the WCW and WWF tag championships with another victory over the Hardys. In all, the Dudleys won six championships in 2001 alone. After spending most of 2002 in singles competition, they reunited at the end of the year, twice winning the World tag team title in 2003. On June 15, 2004, they defeated Rico Constantino and Charlie Haas for the Smackdown version of the tag team title (then known as the WWE tag team championship).

Renaming themselves Team 3-D, Bubba Ray and D-Von made their TNA debut in September 2005. It took over a year, but they finally won the NWA World tag team championship (TNA's officially sanctioned tag title) on April 15, 2007, defeating LAX in a brutal cage match that recalled the glory days of ECW. When TNA severed its ties with the NWA, Team 3-D was named the first-ever TNA World tag team champions. Their feud with Beer Money Inc. in 2009 brought them two more championships. During their TNA tenure, they frequently competed in Japan, winning more championship gold, first in the now-defunct HUSTLE promotion in 2006 and then in New Japan in 2009. They lost and regained New Japan's IWGP title in their TNA feud against Brutus Magnus and Doug Williams, dropping the belts for a final time to Yujiro Takahashi and Tetsuya Naito in Tokyo on January 4, 2010.

Before their breakup earlier this year, Bubba (now Bully) Ray and Devon won eight different tag team titles in five promotions, 24 titles in all. The Steiners and Harlem Heat, tied for the second most World tag team title wins, trail far behind with 10 each. There would always be some wrestling traditionalists who dismissed their hardcore style, yet the Dudleys' championship record guarantees that they will be among the first names mentioned any time fans debate which of wrestling's great tag teams was the greatest ever.

Team 3-D leaves a bloody—but successful—legacy

UDLEY
OYZ
UDLEY

Photo by George Napolitano

KANE ELIMINATES 11 IN 2001 RUMBLE

THE RECORDS THAT WON'T BE BROKEN

Kane was undeniably one of the favorites going into the 2001 Royal Rumble in New Orleans. In his first Rumble match two years earlier, it took him all of 52 seconds to eliminate Road Dogg, Kurrgan, Godfather, and Goldust. He would have doubtless added to his total had he not then eliminated himself, fleeing ringside medical attendants whom he feared sought to re-institutionalize him. He had made a major impact in the 2000 Rumble match as well, entering at number 28 and making short work of Val Venis, Prince Albert, Hardcore Holly, and Billy Gunn.

His impressive performances in the previous two Rumbles, however, pale in comparison to what he did in the 2001 match. By the time he made it to the ring as the sixth entrant, only one of the first five participants remained: a terrified Drew Carey, who wisely eliminated himself. It was in the 17th minute of the match that Kane asserted himself in spectacular fashion. In a mere 41 seconds, he emptied the ring, eliminating Grandmaster Sexay, Steve Blackman, Al Snow, Raven, and Saturn. The Honky Tonk Man was the next entrant and Kane's next victim.

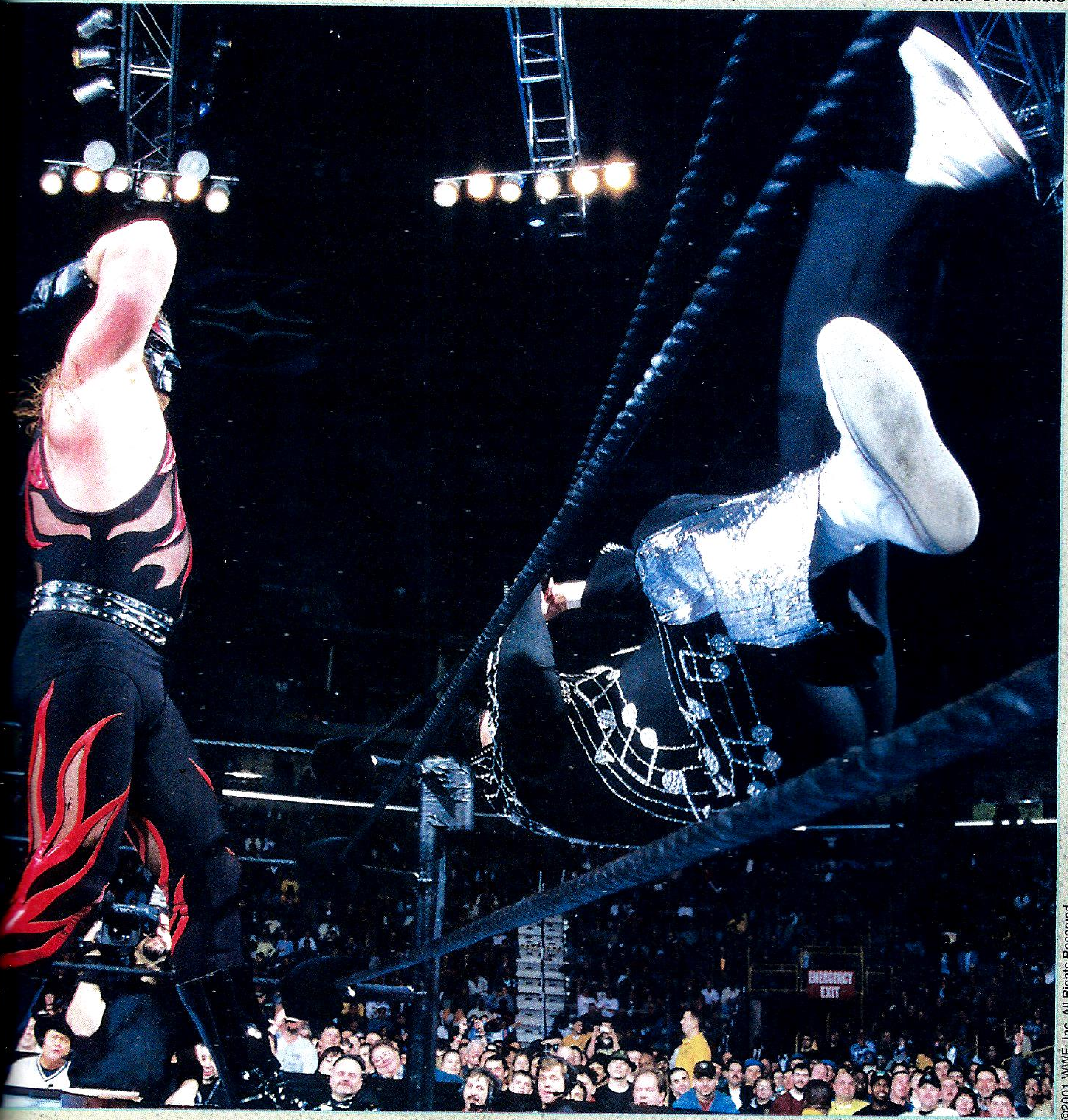
At that point, The Rock hit the ring, and what followed was one of the most dramatic moments in Royal Rumble history. Kane and The Rock went-to-toe, with neither giving an inch. When Tazz tried to come between them, Kane knocked him off the top rope and to the floor at 24:01. Over the next 20 minutes, the ring gradually filled up again, with Kane still dominating. He tossed out Crash Holly at 43:29 and then Albert only two seconds later.

The Undertaker entered the match and joined forces with his half-brother long enough to dispatch Scotty Too Hotty at 45:44. When Kane made The Rock his 11th elimination of the night at 52:42, he broke the record of 10, first set by Hulk Hogan in 1989 and matched by Steve Austin in 1997. Kane would be denied a 12th elimination, however, when a clothesline from Austin sent him over the top rope, ending the match.

In the past decade, The Undertaker (2002), The Great Khali (2007), and John Cena and CM Punk in (2011) have each managed seven eliminations in a single Rumble. And that's the closest anyone has come to breaking Kane's record.

Paul Heyman, who commentated the 2001 Rumble with Jim Ross, points out, "It was a matter of the right circumstances coming together with the right man. Kane was at his physical peak both in terms of stamina and sheer strength. He had a focus that quite frankly, he's lacked at other times in his career. He entered at a point where he ended up having a shot at just about everybody, and the other wrestlers didn't effectively gang up on him, which would have probably been the only way to eliminate him early in the match. So, no, I'm not surprised at all that Kane still has the record. And, no, I really don't see it being broken."

Kane shakes, rattles and rolls HTM from the '01 Rumble



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THE RECORDS THAT WON'T BE BROKEN

SHAWN MICHAELS' 11 MATCHES OF THE YEAR

Throughout his 26-year career, Shawn Michaels often said that his main goal was to have the match of the night. In pursuit of that goal, he ended up being involved in the *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* Match of the Year seven consecutive times and 11 times in total, an unbreakable record and perhaps the strongest evidence that the "Heartbreak Kid" was indeed the sport's ultimate "Showstopper."

In 1993, it was considered a surprise when Michaels' Intercontinental title loss to former tag partner Marty Jannetty was voted *PWI* Match of the Year. After all, it wasn't a high-profile pay-per-view bout, just the main event of an episode of *Raw*. Still, the combination of spectacular high-flying moves, intense brawling, and a surprise finish made the clash between the former Rockers an instant classic.

Even before the ballots came in at the end of 1994, there was little question that Michaels would win his second Match of the Year award. His ladder match against Razor Ramon—the first ladder match to be seen by a national audience—had not only stolen the show at WrestleMania 10, but had introduced the '90s style of extreme wrestling to the mainstream. HBK's failed attempt to defeat then-WWF champion Diesel at WrestleMania 11 wasn't as revolutionary as the Ramon battle, but it was another show-stealer on the year's biggest card, and it, too, garnered Match of the Year honors.

Michaels finally captured the WWF title at WrestleMania 12, defeating Bret Hart in an Iron Man match that won overwhelming praise from all quarters of the wrestling community—and easily won Match of the Year. With this award win, Michaels had broken Bruno Sammartino's record for three consecutive Matches of the Year, and he also became the first wrestler to win four consecutive awards in a single category.

But both Michaels' records were broken in the next decade, and remarkably enough, they were broken by Michaels himself. He returned in 2002 after a four-year absence from the ring, and it soon became clear that he was better than ever. In 2004, he won his fifth Match of the Year award for his WrestleMania 20 battle against Triple-H and Chris Benoit. Michaels was now tied with Sammartino for the most Match of the Year awards, a tie that was broken a year later when

his WrestleMania 21 match against Kurt Angle, perhaps the greatest wrestling clinic of this era, took top honors. The following year, his brutal streetfight against Vince McMahon at WrestleMania 22 won the award, while in 2007, it wasn't his WrestleMania match (second runner-up), but his 57-minute classic against John Cena on the April 23 edition of *Raw* that *PWI* readers deemed to be the year's best.

Michaels padded his record with a bittersweet victory over his hero, Ric Flair, at WrestleMania 24 and consecutive losses in epic matches against The Undertaker at WrestleManias 25 and 26.

Incredibly, in a career that spanned better than a quarter-century, Shawn Michaels was never voted Wrestler of the Year. That was never a goal. He just wanted to have the best match on the card and send the fans home happy.

Shawn Michaels vs. Vince McMahon, 2006 Match of the Year

Photo by George Napolitano

RAW/NITRO COMBINE FOR 10.5 MILLION VIEWERS

THE RECORDS THAT WON'T BE BROKEN

"The Monday Night Wars can officially be declared over."

That was the lead paragraph of the March 15, 1999, edition of Dave Meltzer's *Wrestling Observer Newsletter*.

Indeed, the war that had raged for almost three years when Ted Turner and Eric Bischoff made the decision to debut *Monday Nitro* directly opposite the WWF's *Monday Night Raw* had shifted decidedly in the WWF's favor. The WWF was regularly producing compelling TV drama, while WCW was embarrassing itself with its ineptitude.

The fact that Meltzer was specifically referring to Monday, March 8, is kind of ironic. If the War were indeed over, it certainly went out with a bang. On March 8, 1999, a combined 10,534,200 viewers were tuned in to the two shows, the largest audience ever to watch regularly scheduled episodic wrestling at one time.

Raw did most of the heavy lifting, garnering a 6.46 rating. But even with *Nitro* about to go into a ratings tailspin, it still achieved a 4.4 rating. By comparison, running unopposed today, a typical *Raw* averages a full point less than that.

Yes, the Monday Night War was a great time to be a wrestling fan. It all began on September 4, 1995, when *WCW Nitro* debuted, running in direct competition to what had long been the top-rated wrestling program on cable, *WWF Monday Night Raw*. The first *Nitro* episode received a 2.5 rating, edging out *Raw's* 2.2. In the months that followed, as the two companies did virtually everything possible to outdo one another, more and more fans tuned in, and the wrestling business was soon enjoying its biggest boom in a decade.

On February 26, 1996, both programs exceeded a 3.0 rating for the first time on the same night, with *Nitro's* 3.2 and *Raw's* 3.1. On January 19, 1998, another threshold was crossed as both programs earned fours (*Raw* a 4.0, *Nitro* a 4.5). As *Raw* steadily gained more viewers and *Nitro* continued to hold its own, the combined weekly rating regularly reached 9.0 throughout 1998 and 10.0 in the first quarter of 1999. Virtually each week, a new record was set for the most fans ever to watch two promotions on a single night.

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Nitro, March 8, 1999: Ric Flair vs. Bill Goldberg

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***Raw*, March 8, 1999: Mankind vs. Steve Austin**

On the all-time record night of March 8, 1999, *Raw* featured Mick Foley, in his Mankind persona, battling Steve Austin, with WWF newcomer (and recent WCW defector) Big Show acting as special referee. Providing commentary at ringside was The Rock, then in his third reign as WWF champion and preparing for a defense against Austin three weeks later at WrestleMania 15. After Foley won the match by countout, the champion blindsided Austin, who managed to fight him off in the episode's final moments.

The main event on *Nitro*, meanwhile, saw Bill Goldberg take on Ric Flair for the first time. Though he had lost the WCW World title at Starrcade '98, Goldberg was still the company's major ratings attraction. Flair, who had turned 50 a few weeks earlier, was experiencing a major career resurgence as a heel. The two had a brief but hard-hitting match that was thrown out when WCW World champion Hulk Hogan, who was scheduled to face Flair at the next pay-per-view, led his NWO allies in an attack on both combatants.

Throughout the spring of 1999, *Nitro's* rating fell off dramatically, a decline that continued until its cancellation on March 26, 2001. The end of *Nitro* ensured that the record set on March 8, 1999, would never be broken. Last year, TNA attempted to begin a new Monday Night War by running the second hour of its *Impact* program against the first hour of *Raw*. The result was a disaster for TNA and a powerful reminder that the late-'90s was a unique time in the sport's history.

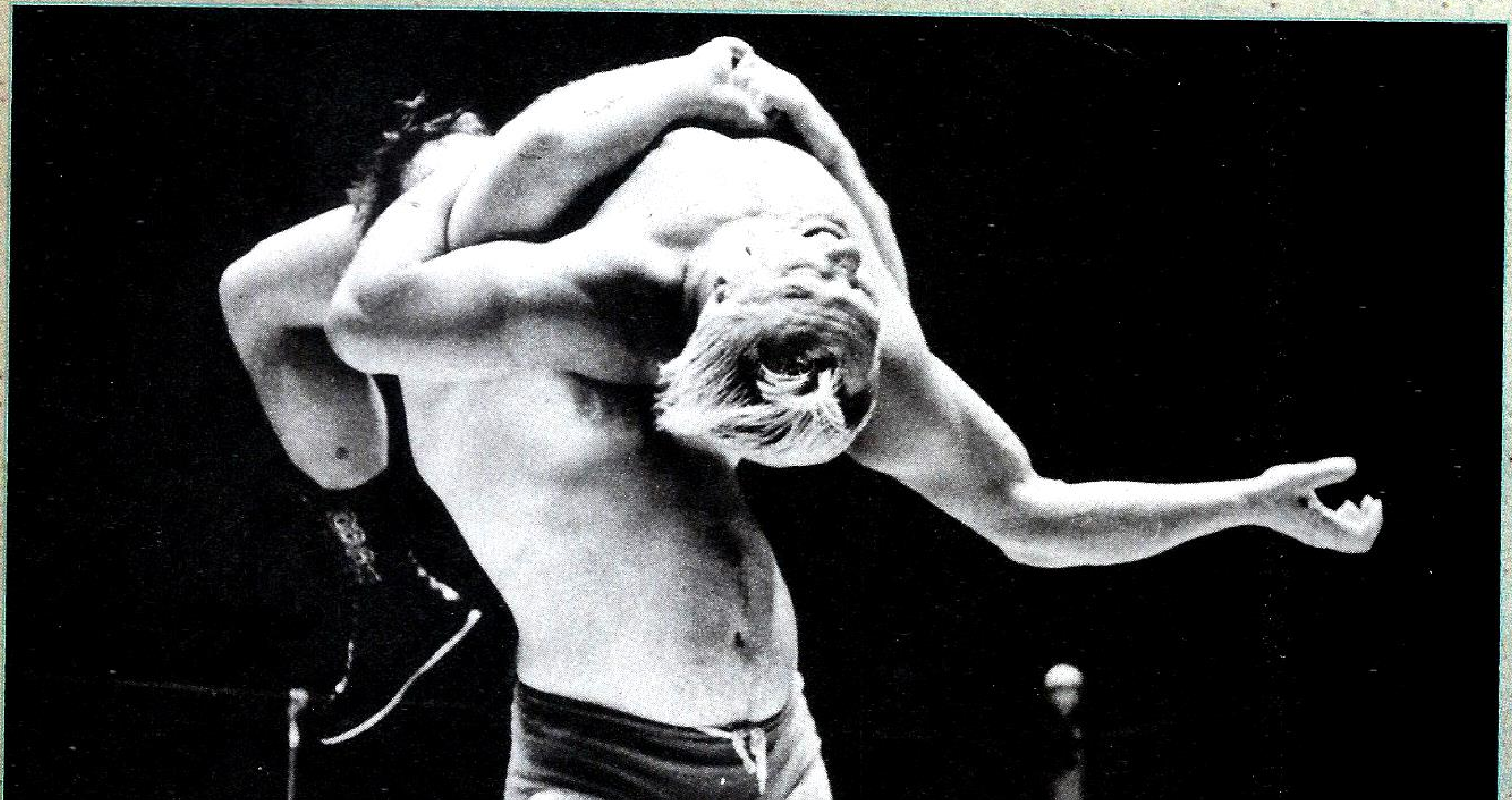
BRUNO SAMMARTINO'S 2,803-DAY WORLD TITLE REIGN

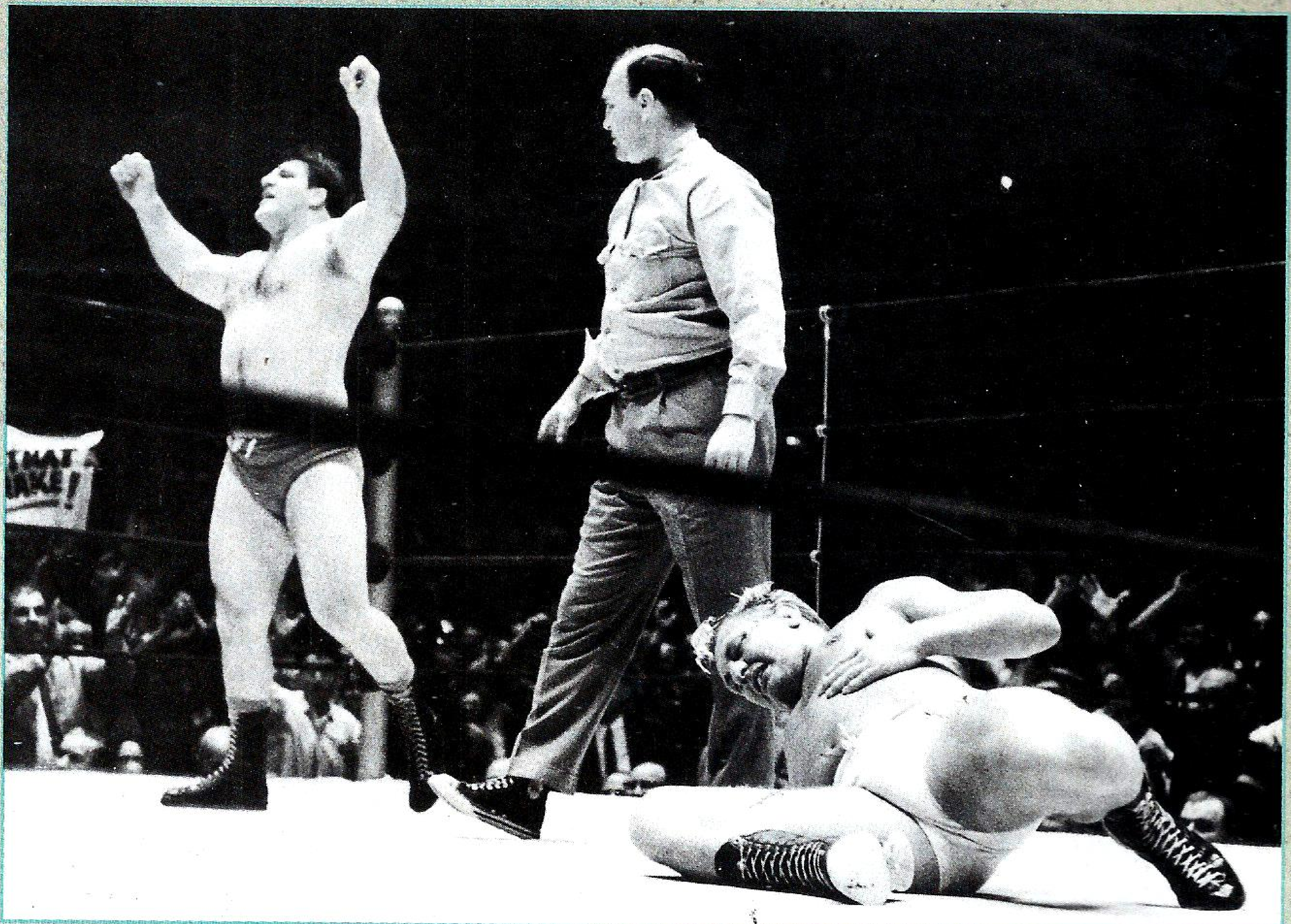
THE RECORDS THAT WON'T BE BROKEN

Bruno Sammartino was 28 years old on May 17, 1963, when he stepped into the ring in Madison Square Garden to challenge "Nature Boy" Buddy Rogers for the World Wide Wrestling Federation heavyweight championship (the precursor to the WWE title). A muscular powerlifter with startling agility, Sammartino had been wrestling professionally for nearly four years, establishing himself as a top star throughout the northeastern United States. He had almost captured the belt on April 18 in a televised match that ended with Rogers saving his title by disqualifying himself. There would be no escape for the Nature Boy on May 17: Sammartino stunned the crowd of 19,649 when he forced Rogers to submit to a backbreaker 48 seconds into the match. Legendary comedian/actor Andy Kaufman was in the audience that night, attending his first live wrestling event, and he often said that the ecstatic response Bruno's victory elicited was one of the most unforgettable experiences of his life.

Twenty-four hours after defeating Rogers, Bruno was in Philadelphia, successfully defending the title against the crafty veteran Miguel Torres. In the months and years that followed, Bruno battled five or six times a week and the competition only got tougher. WWWF head promoter Vincent J. McMahon (father of the present WWE chairman) booked Sammartino against the fiercest rulebreakers of the 1960s, including Killer Kowalski, Gorilla Monsoon, Jerry Graham, Freddie

Bruno lifts Rogers into a backbreaker ...





... And is declared WWWF champion after a mere 48 seconds

Blassie, Bill Miller, Waldo von Erich, Gene Kiniski, Bill Watts, Ernie Ladd, The Sheik, Crusher Verdu, Prof. Toru Tanaka, and Bob Orton Sr.

In March 1967 and again in August 1968, Bruno journeyed to Japan, where he drew sellout crowds for his title defences against Shohei "Giant" Baba. On September 5, 1969, six days after putting back the challenge of George Steele in Philadelphia, Sammartino became the longest reigning world titleholder in the history of the sport, passing Lou Thesz, who had held the NWA world title from November 27, 1949 to March 15, 1956 (1941 days).

By the 1970s, many fans had concluded that Sammartino would retire unbeaten, but that was not to be: On January 18, 1971, 2,803 days since Sammartino had beaten Rogers, a sold-out crowd of 21,666 fans in Madison Square Garden watched in disbelief as an off-the-top-rope kneedrop from Ivan Koloff put the original "people's champion" down for the three-count.

The title loss to Koloff was hardly the end of Sammartino's career. He went on to capture the WWWF championship a second time, holding the belt from December 10, 1973 to April 30, 1977, and he headlined three major supercards in Shea Stadium. His greatest accomplishment, though, remains his first WWWF title reign. Since 1971, no one has come close to breaking Bruno's record. Hulk Hogan's longest title reign lasted from January 23, 1984 to February 5, 1988, just over half the duration of Bruno's. Ric Flair won or was awarded a recognized world championship 19 times in his storied career, but his longest reign (May 24, 1984 to July 26, 1986) was 793 days. Over the past decade, the WWE title that Sammartino once held has changed hands 46 times; the World championship, 44 times.

To be sure, ours is not an area of long title reigns, and even when such reigns were much more common, Sammartino outdid them all.

THE RECORDS THAT WON'T BE BROKEN

FABULOUS MOOLAH'S 30 YEARS AS CHAMPION

If Fabulous Moolah had come along in the 21st century, it's very doubtful that she would have been given an opportunity to compete in WWE or TNA. A swimsuit model she was not. Even SHIMMER or WSU might not have given her a look. She didn't have the repertoire of moves and holds those all-women groups fancy.

All Mary Lillian Ellison did for 54 of her 84 years on earth was win. Her four reigns as Women's World titlist, from 1956 to 1986, totaled 10,778 days.

While it was widely published that hers was a continuous reign from '56 to '84, that was not the case. She was beaten for the title four times during that span, for a grand total of 70 days!

Fabulous Moolah first gained national exposure in the early-'50s as "Slave Girl" Moolah, the valet for the legendary "Nature Boy" Buddy Rogers. Moolah was well-schooled in wrestling fundamentals, but, from the first, what set her apart from her peers was her rulebreaking: As far as women's wrestling goes, she was undeniably "the dirtiest player in the game."

In the late-1950s, Moolah was one of several wrestlers who claimed to be the true Women's champion. Each of these champions sought to fill the gap created by the retirement of Mildred Burke, the undisputed champion from 1937 to 1954. When Burke's hand-chosen successor, June Byers, retired in 1964, the championship Moolah had won in a 1956 Baltimore tournament, and which she had been defending for eight years chiefly in the northeastern United States, gained recognition in virtually all North American promotions. Bette Boucher took the title from her on September 17, 1966, but the "Fabulous One," demonstrating the perseverance that defined her career, regained the championship just two weeks later. She went on to exchange the title with Yukiko Tomoe in 1968, with Sue Green in 1976, and with Evelyn Stevens in 1978.

In 1983, she made one of the shrewdest business decisions of her career: She signed an exclusive contract with Vince K. McMahon, and her belt was engraved WWF Women's Champion. On July 23, 1984, her fifth reign ended when she lost to her former pupil, Wendi Richter, in Madison Square Garden. Pop star Cyndi Lauper managed Richter that night and the match was broadcast on MTV, resulting in a new generation of fans coming to know—and despise—Moolah.

Just when it seemed that the torch had been passed for good, Moolah, dressed as the mysterious Spider Lady, scored a controversial win over Richter on November 25, 1985, for her sixth championship. Still another of her former pupils, Velvet McIntrye, dethroned Moolah on July 3, 1986, only to drop the title back to her six days later. It was Sherri Martel who handed Moolah her first loss that would go unavenged.

Not long after Martel captured the title on July 24, 1987, Moolah called it a career. Amazingly, she briefly came out of retirement at age 76, and on October 17, 1999, with a good deal of assistance from her friend Mae Young, won the title from Ivory, who regained it eight days later.

A sneering Moolah snares Linda Carroll in 1965

The combined length of Moolah's eight reigns is just under 30 years. Burke, with 17 years at the top, remains the second longest-reigning champion. Since Moolah's retirement, Trish Stratus, with seven reigns totaling 2¼ years, has had the greatest longevity of any women's champion.

Given that the number of active women wrestlers has always been tiny compared to that of the men's division, it is perhaps to be expected that great women's champions would have lengthier reigns than their male counterparts. But this still can't fully account for Moolah's three decades of dominance. Simply put, she was the most tenacious, most brilliant women's wrestler ever, and the sport will never see another like her.

33 MILLION WATCH HOGAN-ANDRE REMATCH

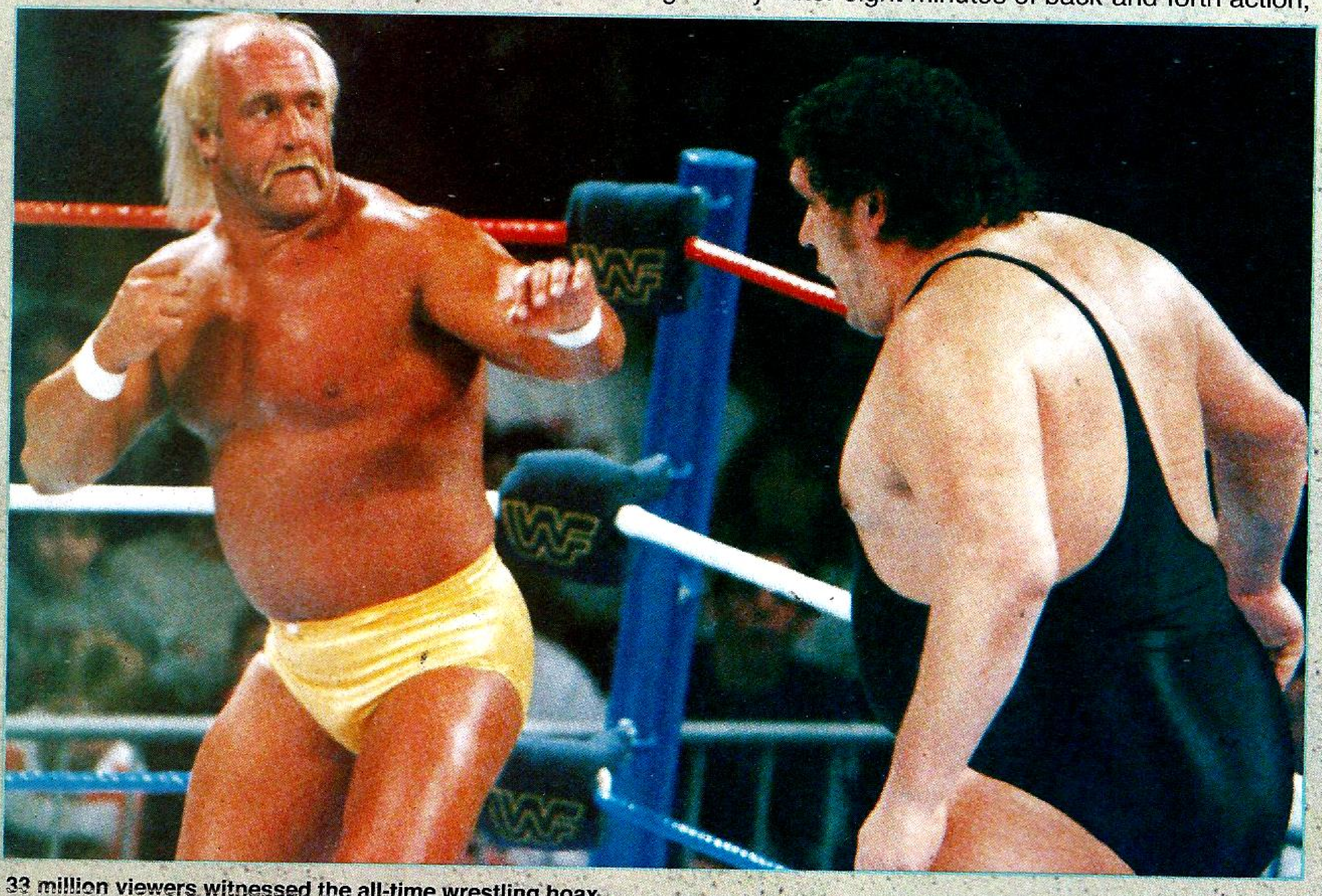
After Hulk Hogan bodyslammed, leg-dropped, and pinned Andre the Giant in their historic WrestleMania 3 main event on March 29, 1987, most people believed that the Giant had wrestled his final match. Who could have imagined that Andre and Hogan would get together once again—in front of a record TV audience of 33 million?

In the fall of 1987, Andre returned to the WWF, committed to avenging his loss. He led his side to victory against Hogan's team in the inaugural Survivor Series on November 26, and then choked out the champion on the January 3, 1988, edition of *Saturday Night's Main Event*.

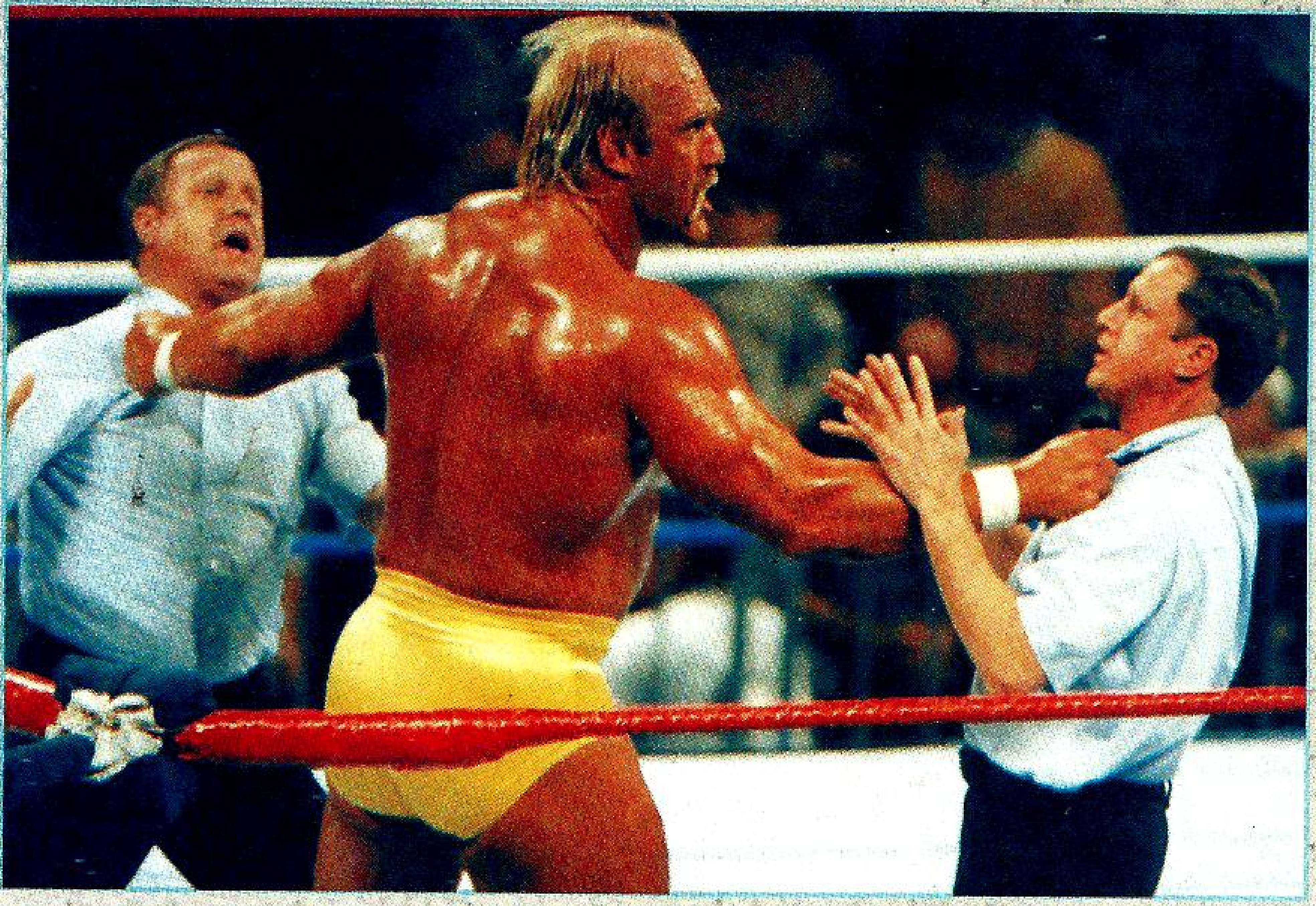
Meanwhile, "Million-Dollar Man" Ted DiBiase, a newcomer to the WWF, was chasing Hogan as well. Instead of trying to win the WWF title in the ring, DiBiase attempted to buy it from the "Hulkster," who flatly refused his million-dollar offer. Undaunted, DiBiase decided he would purchase Andre's contract from manager Bobby Heenan and develop a strategy to ensure that the Giant would beat Hogan for him.

Thus, it was with DiBiase by his side that Andre came to the ring on February 5, 1988, at the Market Square Arena in Indianapolis, Indiana, for his rematch against Hogan, then entering his fifth year as champion.

The match is remembered today for having one of the most bizarre finishes in wrestling history. After eight minutes of back-and-forth action,



33 million viewers witnessed the all-time wrestling hoax



DiBiase distracted the referee long enough for Andre to catch the champion in a double-underhook suplex. The ref made the three-count on Hogan, even though Hogan had clearly raised his shoulder before two. Andre was declared the new champion, but his reign ended only 40 seconds after the pinfall, when he surrendered the title to DiBiase. The ref who had raised Andre's hand was then revealed to be a fraud: It hadn't been WWF official Dave Hebner calling the match, but Hebner's twin brother, Earl, who had been paid off by DiBiase. As a result of all the chicanery, WWF President Jack Tunney vacated the championship and set up a title tournament for WrestleMania 4.

Andre's controversial title win didn't headline a pay-per-view, as a match of its magnitude would today. Rather, it headlined an hour-long NBC prime-time special dubbed *The Main Event*, which also included an Intercontinental title match between then-champion The Honky Tonk Man and Randy Savage. The WWF's *Saturday Night's Main Event* program had been part of the NBC schedule for nearly three years, taking over *Saturday Night Live's* 11:30 time slot five times a year. The ratings the late shows earned convinced NBC President Brandon Tartikoff to bring back professional wrestling to prime-time network television for the first time since March 9, 1955.

When the ratings for *The Main Event* came in, both NBC and the WWF had reason to celebrate: An astounding 33 million viewers had tuned in to watch the most anticipated rematch of the 1980s. *The Main Event* set the record for the most watched televised wrestling program ever, and considering NBC's most recent prime-time offering of pro wrestling, a replay of WrestleMania 27 in July, drew a 1.1 rating (3.6 million viewers), it's highly likely that the *Main Event* record will stand forever.

STECHER VS. LEWIS GOES FIVE HOURS

THE RECORDS THAT WON'T BE BROKEN

Joe Stecher and Ed "Strangler" Lewis were unquestionably the two greatest wrestlers of their generation. Stecher was just 22 years old and three years into his career when he defeated Charles Cutler on July 5, 1915, to win the World title. Using the bodyscissors as his finisher, Stecher trounced one challenger after another—that is, until he faced the Strangler.

Lewis wrestled his first pro match in 1910 at age 19. His rivalries with Wladek Zbyszko and Ben Roller (from whom he won a version of the American championship in 1913) made him a star, and on October 10, 1915, in Evansville, Ohio, he faced Stecher for the first time. The match went back and forth for two hours, with neither man gaining the advantage for long. In the end, Stecher was declared the winner when an ill-advised dive over the top rope left Lewis injured and unable to continue.

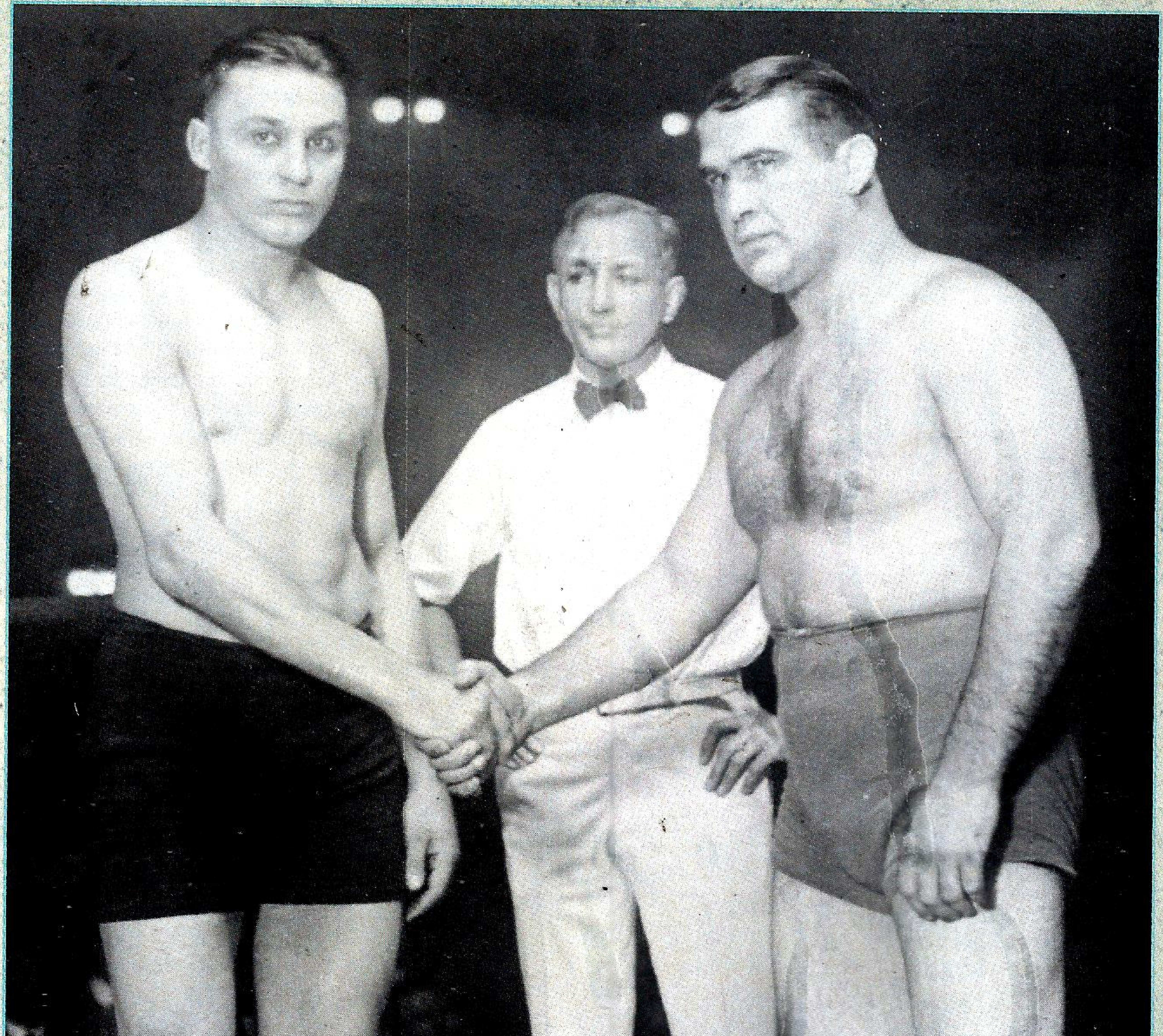
As Stecher moved on to other opponents, Lewis put himself back into title contention by dominating a grueling International tournament held at the Manhattan Opera House from November 8, 1915, to January 29, 1916. A second Stecher-Lewis match was soon signed for July 4, 1916, at the fairgrounds in Benson, Nebraska (just outside of Omaha).

Billed by promoter Gene Melady as a battle between "possibly the two greatest athletes in the world today," Stecher-Lewis II was, in the words of historian Tim Hornbaker, "one of only a handful of striking instances when two perfectly matched opponents met in the squared circle, and generated national media attention, high drama, and the imagination of wrestling fans around the country."

The match, which drew 20,000 fans, started at 4 in the afternoon. Lewis' strategy soon became apparent: He would stay out of Stecher's reach until the champion let his guard down and made a mistake. Lewis thus wrestled an almost entirely defensive match. Hour after hour went by, the sun set, and Stecher still hadn't made a mistake, nor had Lewis made his move. It was at the five-hour mark that referee Ed Smith, fearing for the health of both wrestlers, finally called off the match, ruling it a draw.

According to newspaper reports at the time, the vast majority of the crowd considered the slow-paced match to be a terrible bore. Within a few years, however, the match had gained legendary status, significantly enhancing the reputations of both wrestlers, who went on to have several big-money rematches.

In the 1920s and 1930s, there were many world title matches that lasted between two to three hours, some of which involved Stecher and Lewis. Until the mid-1980s, hour-long world title matches were quite commonplace, particularly in the NWA. But there's never been another five-hour match, and it seems inconceivable there ever will be. Thus, though the fans in 1916 may have panned their record-setting match, it ensured that Stecher and Lewis will always top the list of the sport's foremost iron men.



Stecher and Lewis would next shake hands in five hours

LOU THESZ' WORLD TITLES IN FOUR DECADES

THE RECORDS THAT WON'T BE BROKEN

In the late-1930s, pro wrestling desperately needed a new star. Danno O'Mahoney had been a flash in the pan, and the talented Jim Browning died a young man in 1936. By mid-1936, the major promoters put their hopes on Everett Marshall, awarding him the National Wrestling Association World heavyweight championship, the most prestigious world title of the day. But Marshall's reign came to a shocking end on December 29, 1937, when he was beaten in St. Louis by a hometown boy, the 21-year-old Lou Thesz, a gifted technical wrestler trained by legends Ed "Strangler" Lewis and Ad Santel.

Thesz' first title reign was less than six weeks long, but it established him as the leader of the new generation. On February 23, 1939, he proved that the reign hadn't been a fluke when he unseated Marshall again, this time holding the belt for four months. Military service during World War II interrupted Thesz' flourishing career. When he returned to the ring at the war's end, he reached new heights of greatness.

After winning the Association title two more times—from Whipper Billy Watson on April 25, 1947, and from Bill Longson on June 20, 1948—Thesz entered the next and most important phase of his championship career. In 1948, the major Midwest promoters formed the National Wrestling Alliance and recognized veteran Orville Brown as its World champion. As more and more promotions joined the Alliance, a unification match between Brown and Thesz (still the Association champion) was scheduled, but it had to be canceled when Brown was injured in a career-ending car accident. Thus, on November 27, 1949, the Alliance declared Thesz the champion (a decision that led to the National Wrestling Association essentially being absorbed by the Alliance).

Thesz began traveling North America, successfully defending his title against the top stars of regional promotions. By the early-1950s, a period in which television brought wrestling millions of new fans and changed the sport forever, Thesz was the undisputed world heavyweight champion. His first National Wrestling Alliance reign, which lasted nearly seven years, was brought to an end by his old rival Watson on March 15, 1956. He regained the belt on November 9, 1956, and held it for another year, dropping it to Dick Hutton on November 14, 1957. After a wildly profitable world tour, Thesz, now in his early-40s, went into semi-retirement, his legacy secure.

As a new era dawned in the 1960s, the last thing anyone expected was that Thesz would come back to win another world title, but that's exactly what happened on January 24, 1963, in Toronto, when he pinned his bitterest enemy, reigning NWA champion Buddy Rogers. Thesz held the NWA strap for nearly three more years before losing it to Gene Kiniski on January 7, 1966. He retired as the only man ever to have won a widely recognized world heavyweight championship in four different decades, a record that has never been in danger of falling. Indeed, there's never been a world heavyweight title match in which the challenger, if victorious, would have tied Thesz' record. It's therefore hardly surprising that a majority of wrestling historians regard Thesz as the greatest world titlist ever. He was, Jim Ross noted recently, "DiMaggio and Gehrig combined."

Thesz tosses Bob Orton Sr. during a 1964 defense

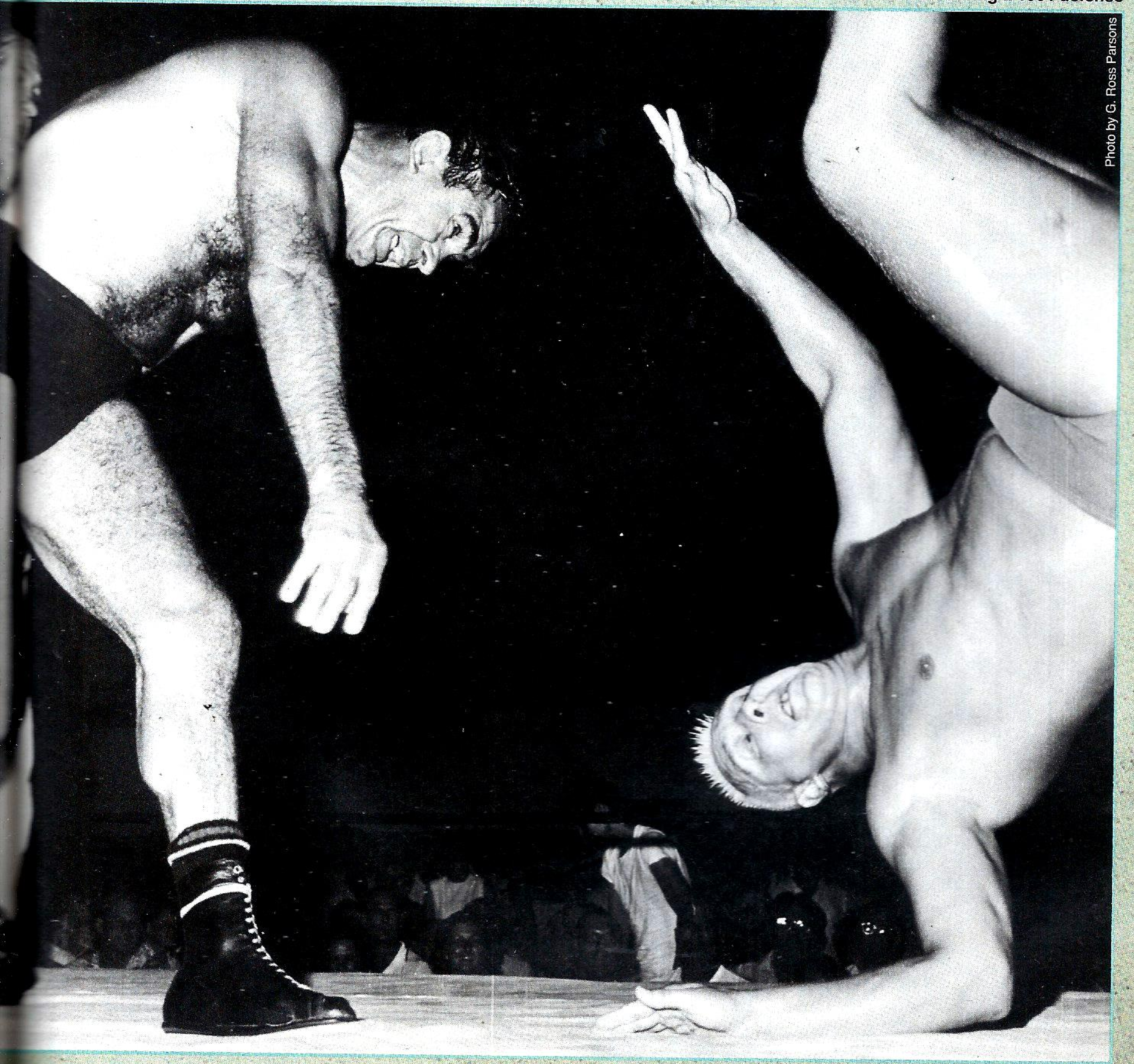


Photo by G. Ross Parsons

UNDERTAKER'S UNDEFEATED 'MANIA STREAK

THE RECORDS THAT WON'T BE BROKEN

The biggest news in the wrestling world coming out of WrestleMania 7 on March 4, 1991, was Hulk Hogan capturing his third WWF World title with a win over Sgt. Slaughter, or perhaps Randy Savage being forced into retirement with his loss to The Ultimate Warrior. There wasn't much comment on a match deep in the undercard that saw The Undertaker, who had debuted in the WWF only a few months before at the Survivor Series, crush Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka, one of the most popular stars of the 1980s, in 4:20. Yet we now realize that this was the most historically significant match on the card, because it began 'Taker's legendary WrestleMania winning streak, which currently stands at 19.

There's not much 'Taker hasn't done at WrestleMania—that is, except lose. He's beaten several of Snuka's fellow '80s icons (Jake Roberts at WM 8, King Kong Bundy at WM 11, and Ric Flair at WM 18). He's downed seven-footers (Giant Gonzales at WM 9 and Diesel at WM 12). He's captured world titles (from Psycho Sid at WM 13, Batista at WM 23, and Edge at WM 24). He's been victorious in a Hell in the Cell match (against Big Bossman at WM 15), in a casket match (against Mark Henry at WM 22), and in what turned out to be a handicap match (against Big Show and A-Train at WM 19) when his tag partner, Nathan Jones, suffered an injury. He's overcome his half-brother Kane twice (at WM 13 and 20). He's taught a lesson in respect to a self-proclaimed "legend killer" (Randy Orton at WM 21). And he's put back—albeit just barely—multiple challenges from two of the greatest stars of his generation, Triple-H (at WM 17 and 28) and Shawn Michaels (at WM 25 and 26).

It was beginning with the Orton match that The Undertaker's streak became central to each year's WrestleMania. Unquestionably, a good deal of the staggering financial success of the past eight WrestleManias can be attributed to the fans' desire to find out if the streak would live for another year.

For years, every wrestler on the WWE roster has known that beating 'Taker at the year's biggest event would guarantee main-event status for the rest of one's career—precisely what a World title run meant in previous eras.

Given 'Taker's age (49) and the serious injuries he has sustained in recent years, it's quite possible that the streak will end at WrestleMania 28. There's even a chance that those injuries will prevent him from competing at another WrestleMania. But whatever the future may hold for the "Dead Man," his streak will surely never be equaled, much less surpassed. The second-longest WrestleMania winning streak belongs to Edge, who gained five victories before suffering his first loss. Hulk Hogan, Steve Austin, and John Cena have each managed four consecutive wins. All impressive feats, but a far cry from what The Undertaker has pulled off.

And thus it is with good reason that some time in the not-so-distant future, it will be the WrestleMania streak, not his seven world titles, that will be the topic of conversation at the Hall of Fame ceremony honoring his career.

Undertaker destroys Orton, number 13 of 19

WRESTLEMANIA

Photo by George Napolitano

Photo by George Napolitano

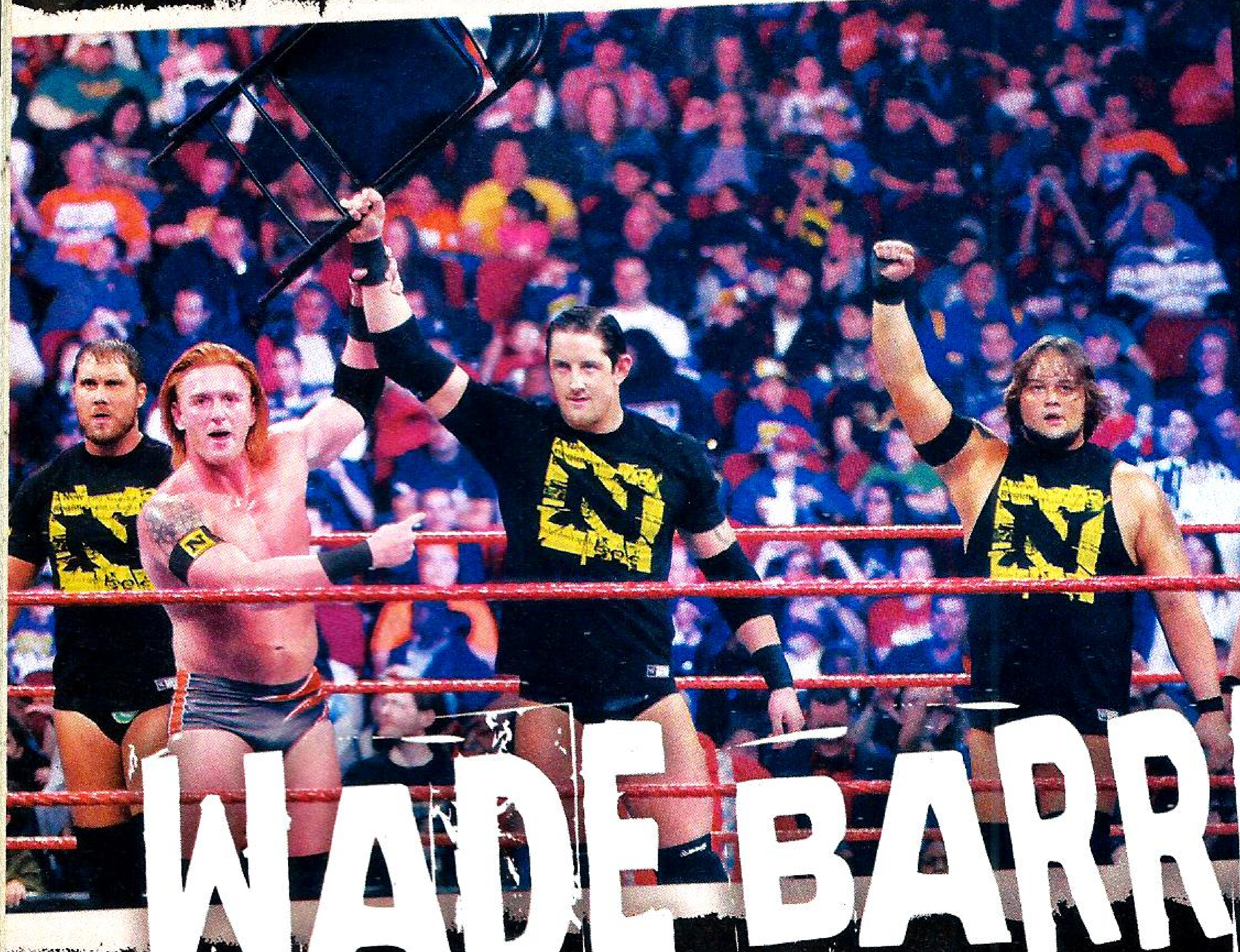


Photo by Stu Saks

WADE BARRETT

NOW HE MUST SAVE HIMSELF FROM THE NEXUS/CORRE!

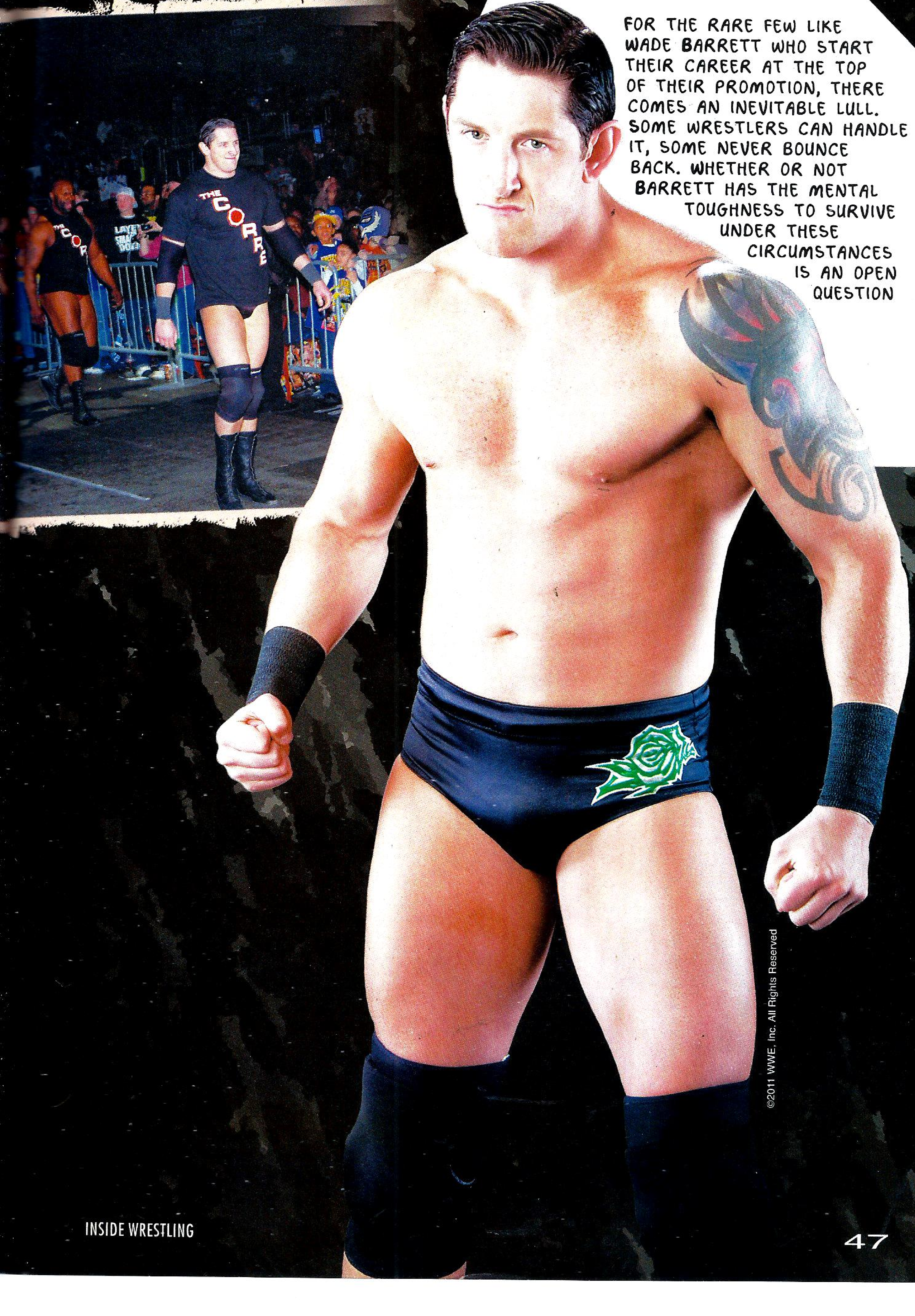
By Bill Meltzer

IN THE WORLD of pro wrestling, there is real danger in a young athlete experiencing too much success too quickly. As the careers of Buff Bagwell and Tommy Rich suggest, a young wrestler may be unable to sustain the momentum he or she has built, which is why the pressure of heightened expectations has been known to crush even some of the most promising performers. With WWE looking to develop new main-event caliber wrestlers as rapidly as possible, this phenomenon has become all too common.

Wade Barrett, who burst onto the WWE scene as the leader of The Nexus faction following his introduction as the winner of the first season of *NXT*, is dealing with precisely the same scenario.

As the undisputed leader of the group, he immediately set the bar extremely high for himself, orchestrating gang attacks on several established WWE stars—fan favorites and heels alike—that turned him into the most feared man on the roster. Barrett headlined pay-per-view events and even had John Cena at his mercy, compelling him to join The Nexus and then subjecting himself to a temporary dismissal from WWE. The only thing Barrett failed to do was win Cena's WWE championship.

Right from the outset, though, there were question marks over whether Barrett was setting himself up for short-term success and long-term failure. His iron-fisted leadership style over The Nexus was virtually guaranteed to cause dissention in the ranks. Barrett's eventual ouster from the group came as a surprise to no one,



FOR THE RARE FEW LIKE WADE BARRETT WHO START THEIR CAREER AT THE TOP OF THEIR PROMOTION, THERE COMES AN INEVITABLE LULL. SOME WRESTLERS CAN HANDLE IT, SOME NEVER BOUNCE BACK. WHETHER OR NOT BARRETT HAS THE MENTAL TOUGHNESS TO SURVIVE UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES IS AN OPEN QUESTION

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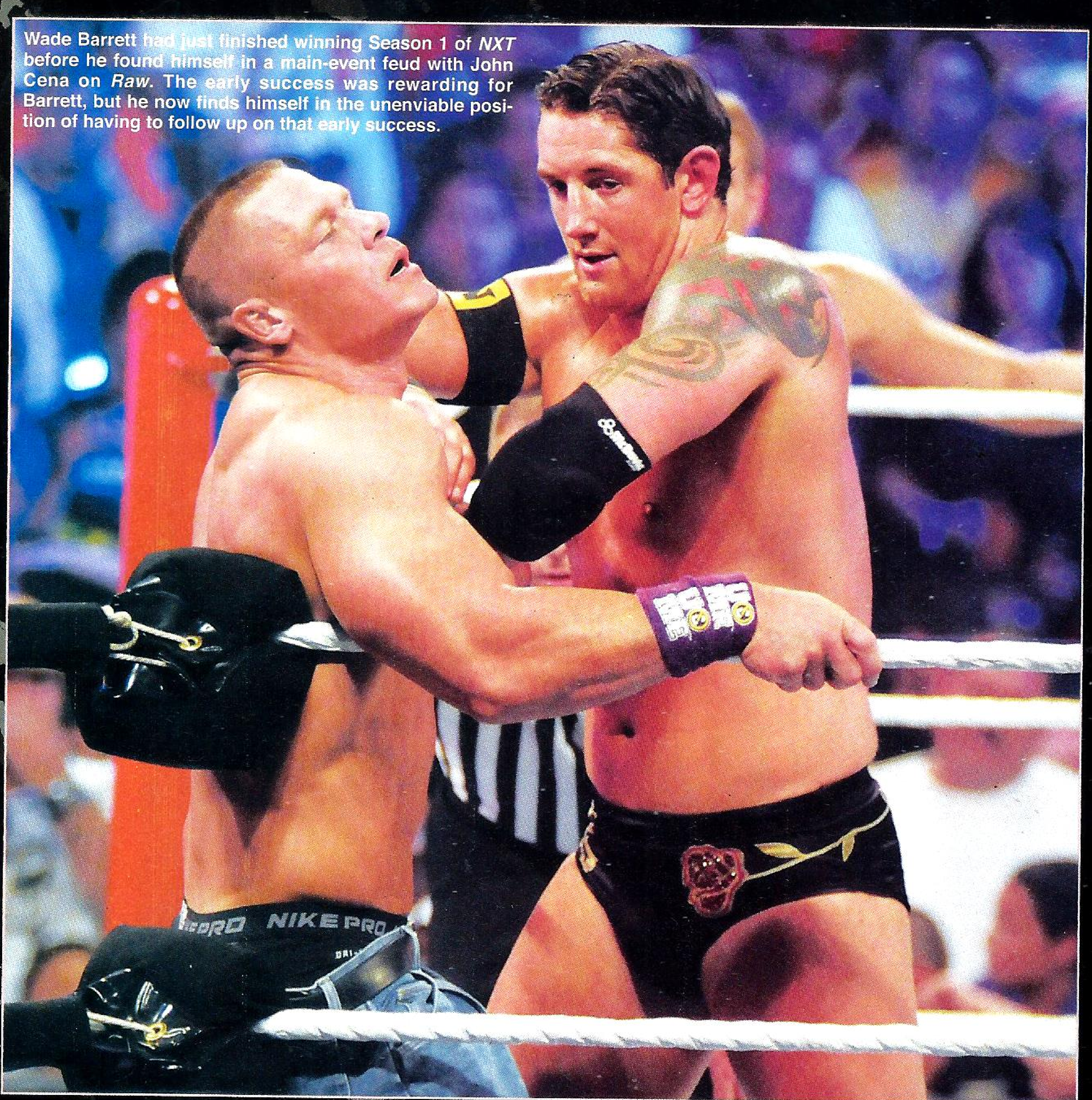


Wade Barrett had just finished winning Season 1 of *NXT* before he found himself in a main-event feud with John Cena on *Raw*. The early success was rewarding for Barrett, but he now finds himself in the unenviable position of having to follow up on that early success.

Photo by George Napolitano

and his subsequent efforts to build the splinter faction known as The Corre into a similar powerhouse under his leadership have been largely a failure.

The Corre quickly became more of an albatross around Barrett's neck than a boon to his ambitions of WWE stardom. The group scarcely achieved a fraction of the success of the original Nexus, and Barrett has mostly been treading water in his solo career while trying in vain to duplicate the success he achieved upon his arrival.

Barrett's win-loss record has taken a nosedive, along with his position on the roster. He's gone from a headliner on the flagship *Raw* program to a midcarder on *Smackdown*. His 89-day reign with the Intercontinental championship was unimpressive, and few were surprised by his title loss to former comrade Ezekiel Jackson.

Although Barrett earned a berth in the Smackdown half of the Money in the Bank ladder match at the eponymous pay-per-view event, he failed to win the match and the automatic WWE World championship shot that came with it. To add insult to injury, the man who claimed the briefcase was none other than Barrett's nemesis and former Nexus member, Daniel Bryan.

Smackdown commentator Booker T has seen many wrestlers in Barrett's situation, including himself. Before going on to win six world championships in WCW, Booker experienced a slump as a singles wrestler shortly after his initial wave of success as a member of Harlem Heat.

"Each wrestler's circumstances are different," said Booker, "and I have to say that Barrett's were as unique as I've ever seen. There's no denying his talent in the ring, but we all know that talent had little to do with what got him to the top so quickly. Once Nexus went into decline, and then The Corre, he was naked in the ring—no different than any other guy at that early stage of his career."

The big question in Booker's mind is whether or not Barrett can make the adjustment from being the star of *Raw* to being a talented wrestler who has to prove himself the way everyone else has had to.

"It's one thing to start at the bottom and work your way up," Booker said. "It's another to start at the top, fall way down, and have to work your way back up again. It's like inheriting money, losing it, and having to claw your way back. It's easier to be the guy who started out poor and had to work his way up."

For his part, the 31-year-old Brit attributes his recent struggles to bad luck and a conspiracy among his current and former victims to keep him down.

"Listen, I've made a lot of enemies in WWE since the end of *NXT*," he said. "There is a lot of fear and jealousy toward me because I skipped past the mid-card and went straight to the top of WWE. I know the sailing isn't always smooth. But I also know my enemies are trying to play mind games with me because they've had a few setbacks of their own."

Those hardly sound like the words of a wrestler who has a handle on his own situation. But in fairness to Barrett, there have been some recent signs that he has regained some equilibrium. And while Booker T advocates a long, hard look in the mirror for Barrett, he says two things can tide him over the slump: First, Barrett must extract all the positive things he did to beat Daniel Bryan at SummerSlam, and use them as the foundation for a new game plan going forward. Indeed, Barrett looked even better than his former self in that bout—moving around the ring with precision and power to beat the smaller, but technically superior, Bryan. It is critical for Barrett to focus on the things that worked in that match, says Booker, because it will keep his confidence high, and make him more likely to try new things in the ring.

Secondly, Barrett must officially divorce himself from The Corre, which he has yet to do. While Barrett sees himself as still being the leader of some kind of youth movement, it is difficult to effect change if you're buried in the mid-card on the B-brand. Barrett's tepid track record as a faction leader is holding him back much more than anything going on between his ears. If Barrett hopes to be a leader of men, he should begin by leading himself back to the WWE top tier. Any association with a WWE gang, no matter who its members are, is simply a distraction to Barrett's singles career.

"When it comes to that Nexus and Corre nonsense, I got three words for Wade Barrett," Booker says. "Give it up!"

Only time will tell if Barrett can dig it. ☐

Photo by George Napolitano

Former Corre stablemate Ezekiel Jackson clearly got the better of his feud with Barrett. Wade will never admit that he's having trouble adjusting to life on the mid-card, but that seems to be the case.

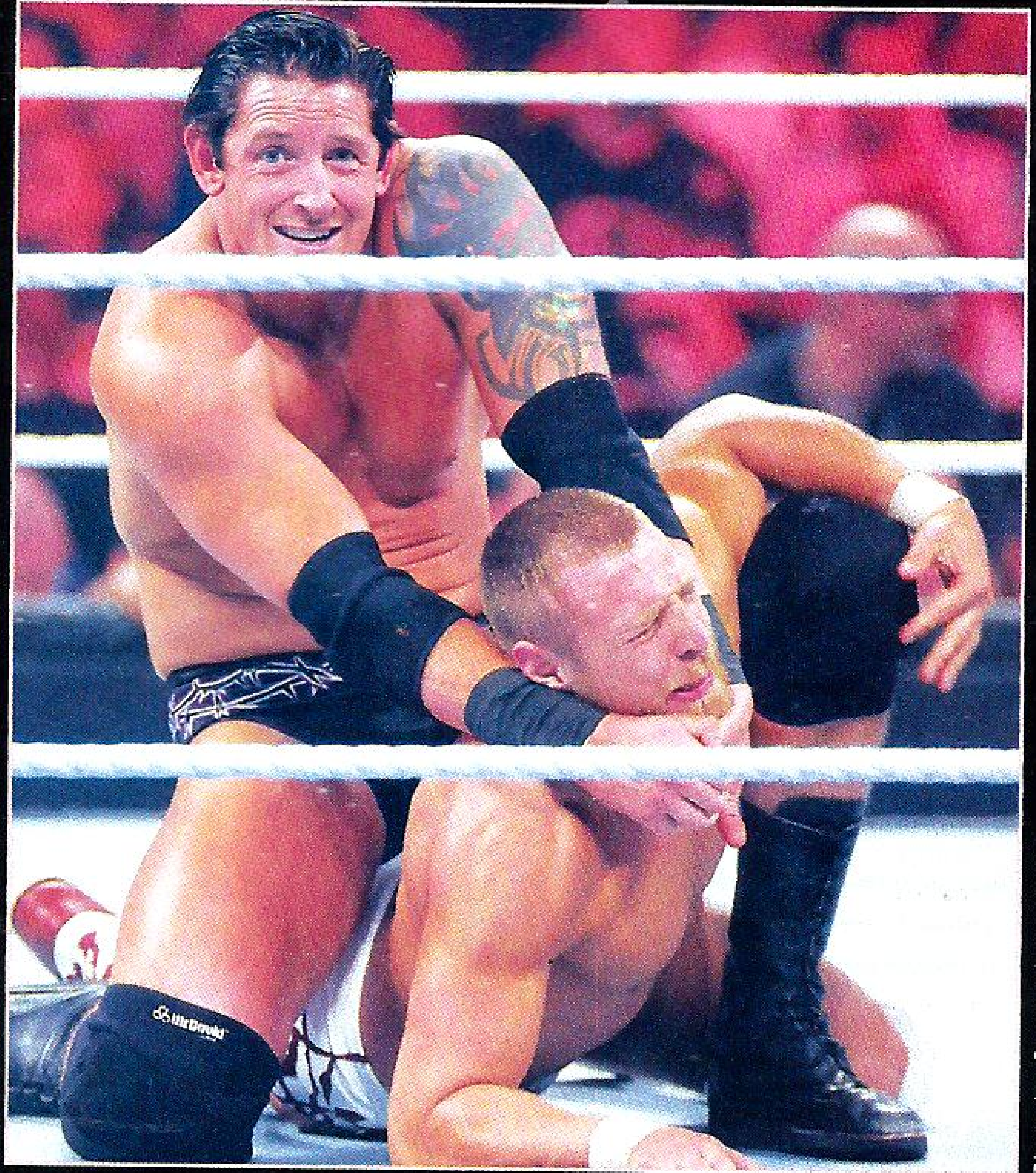
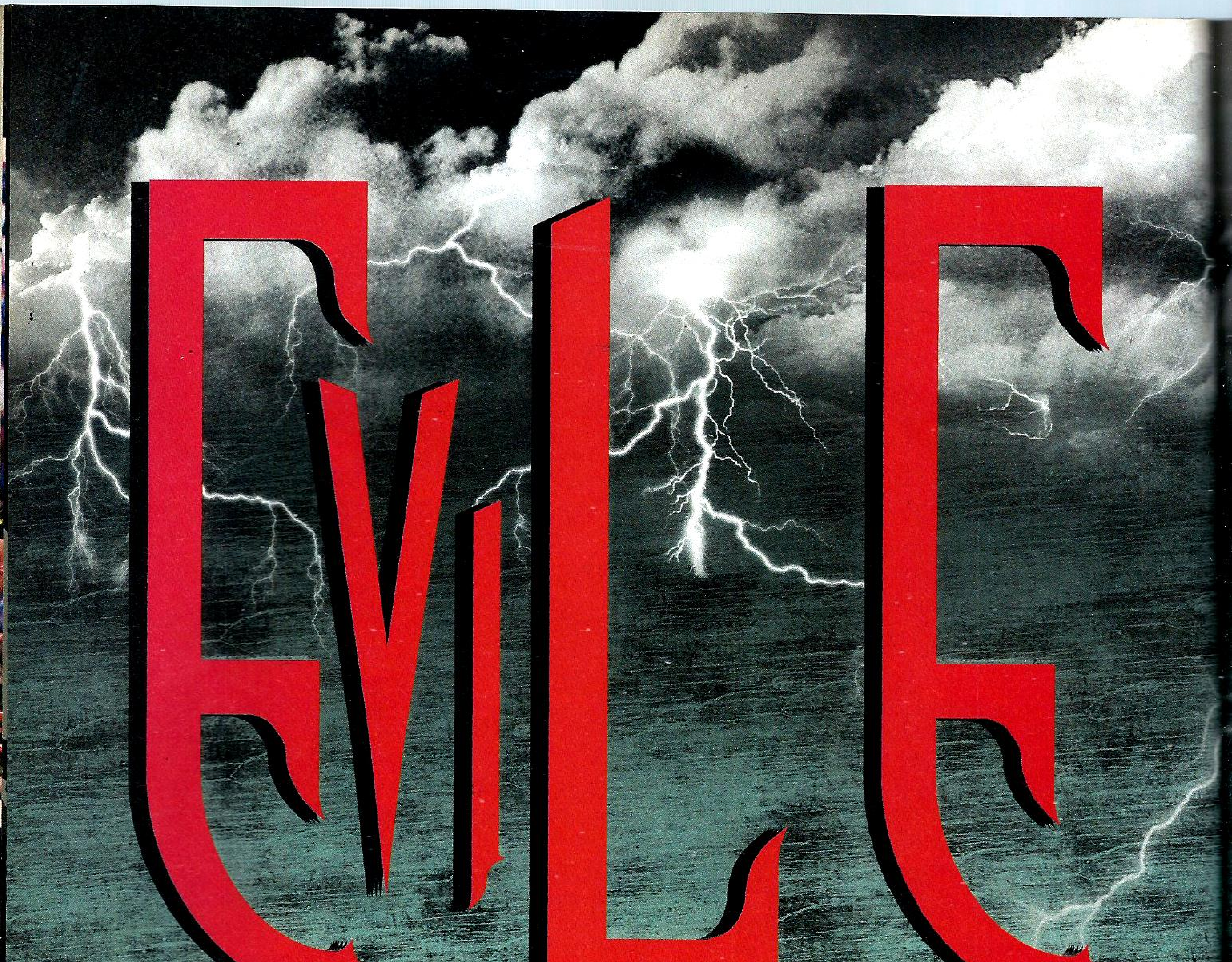


Photo by George Napolitano

Barrett looked better than ever against Daniel Bryan at SummerSlam. It is critical that Barrett incorporate the best elements of this match into future matches if he hopes to return to his early form.



EVIL E

ERIC BISCHOFF NEEDS TO BE PUT OUT OF OUR MISERY ... AND FAST!

By Al Alven

On the rare occasions that Eric Bischoff even attempts to smile these days, it seems the best he can muster is a contemptuous sneer. What's his problem and how much longer can TNA put up with it?

THE "EASY E" NICKNAME no longer applies to Eric Bischoff. In fact, it's no stretch to say that Bischoff has become the most miserable man in wrestling.

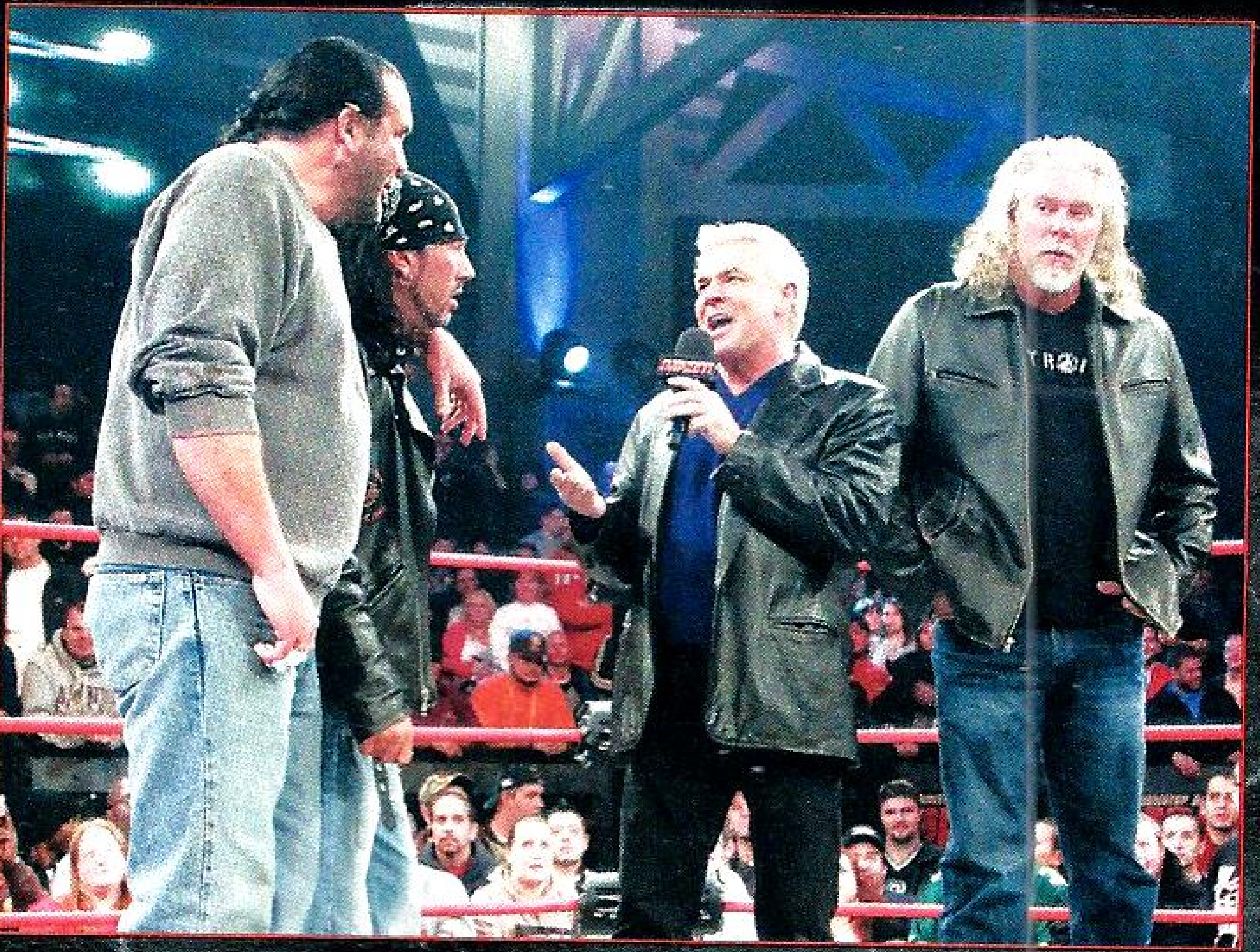
Granted, Bischoff was never known for his jocularity or affability, but just one look at his TNA tenure to this point shows that he has tremendous difficulty getting along with just about any wrestler he encounters.

The list of TNA wrestlers Bischoff has clashed with since his 2010 arrival in the company includes Jeff Jarrett, Mick Foley, Kurt Angle, Sting, AJ Styles, Mr. Anderson, Jeff Hardy, Hulk Hogan, Rob Van Dam, and Abyss. His disdain for the X division as a whole—and for the group's members individually—is so open that it has become fodder for TNA's weekly *Impact Wrestling* program.

Certainly, helping run any wrestling promotion, especially a major federation like TNA, is bound to have its challenges and frustrations.

TNA
WRESTLING

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



Photos by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

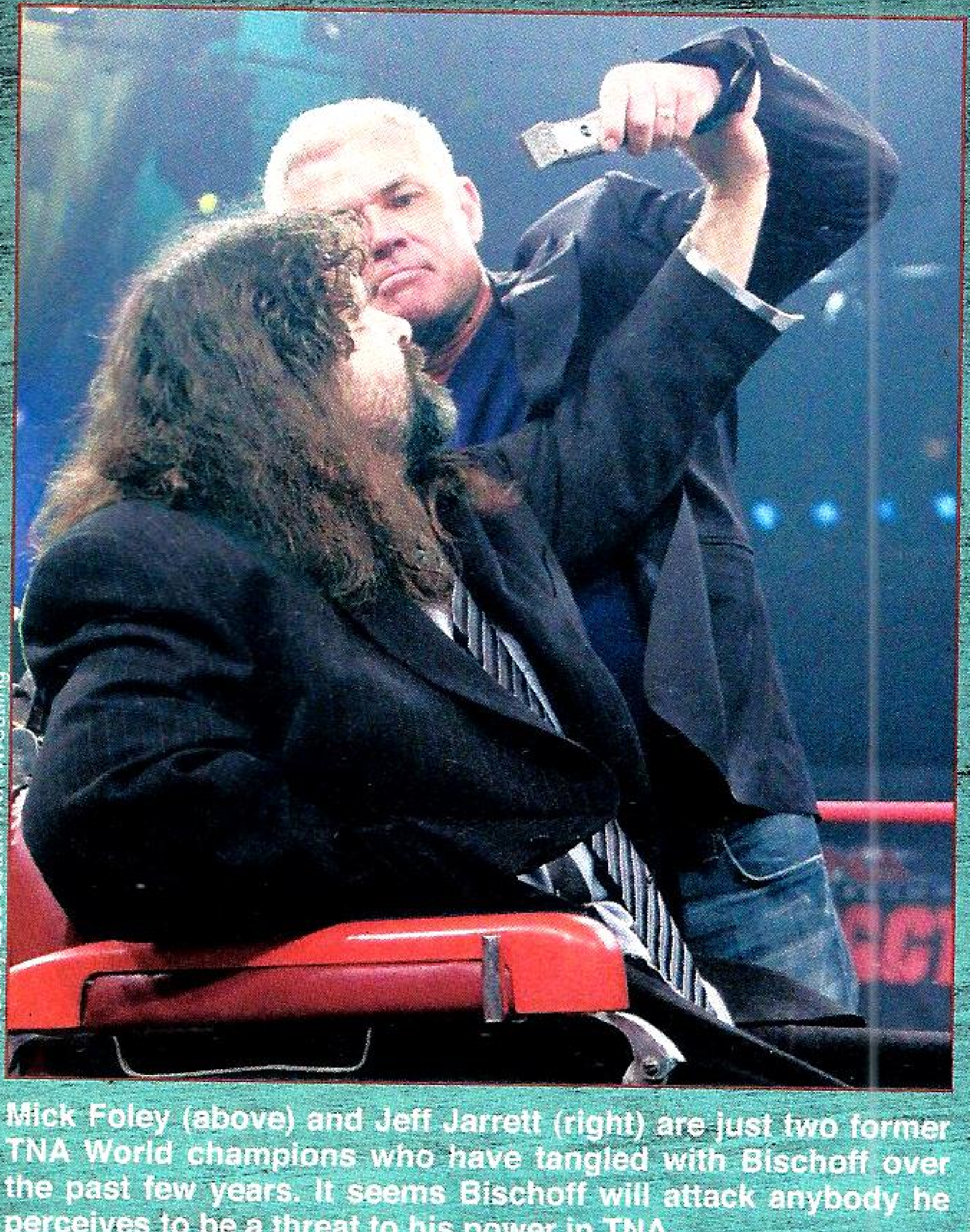
Bischoff seemed almost giddy when former NWO mates Kevin Nash, Scott Hall, and Sean Waltman first joined him on *Impact* in January 2010 (left). However, he's flashed his teeth at Hulk Hogan (above), another friend from the WCW era, proving that nobody in TNA is safe from his anger.

And, let's face it, few bosses, no matter how hard they try, are universally loved, or even respected, by the people who work under them. Still, the manner in which Bischoff had treated TNA's top stars over the past few years dictates that it is he—not TNA's wrestlers—who needs a severe and immediate attitude adjustment.

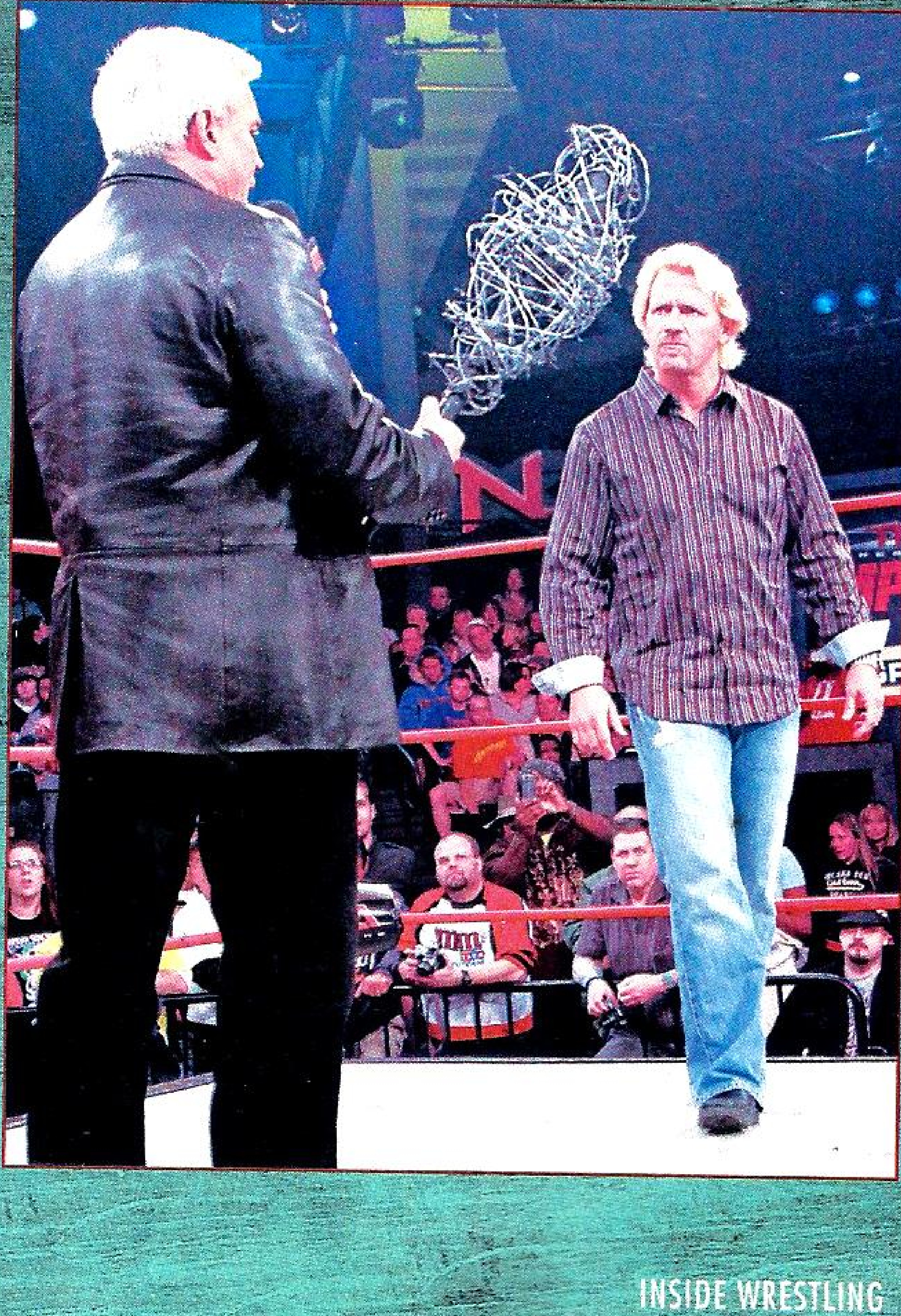
Any hope of getting Bischoff to lighten up requires an understanding of what's fueling his anger in the first place, and the secret to unraveling Bischoff's rotten attitude begins with his perception of the X division.

Remember Bischoff's experience in WCW? He rebuilt the company primarily on the philosophy that oversized, established veterans draw money. The undeniable success of the NWO, which included men like Kevin Nash, Scott Hall, and Hogan, helped catapult WCW to the top of the wrestling industry in the late-'90s, and only strengthened Bischoff's faith in that formula.

However, another dynamic was playing out while the NWO ran roughshod over WCW—the cruiserweights were developing a fan base of their own among those who appreciated the agility and energy many of the aging behemoths couldn't consistently deliver in the ring. To be fair, the rise of the cruiserweight division in WCW was mostly Bischoff's doing. He's the one



Photos by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



Mick Foley (above) and Jeff Jarrett (right) are just two former TNA World champions who have tangled with Bischoff over the past few years. It seems Bischoff will attack anybody he perceives to be a threat to his power in TNA.

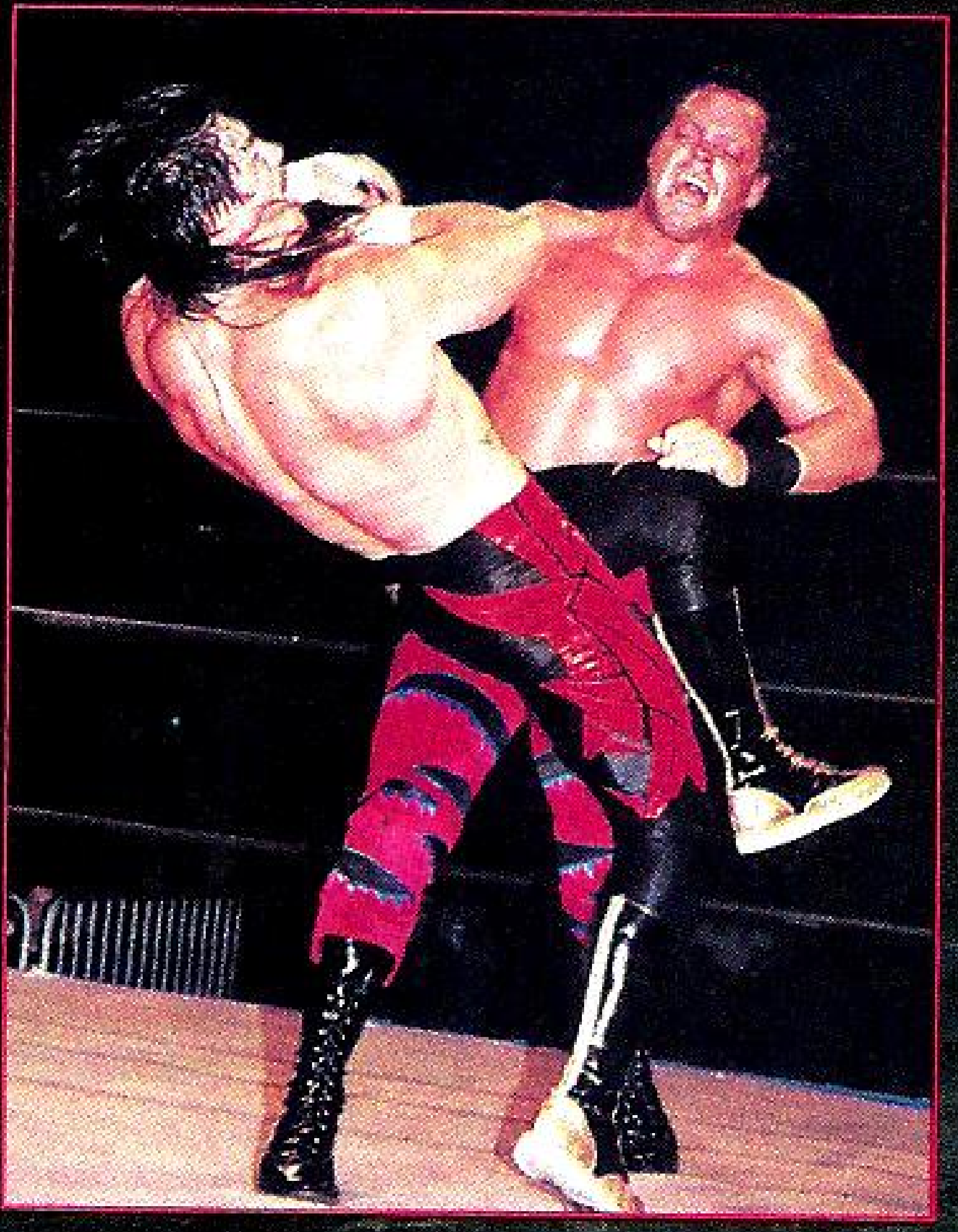


Photo by Steve Beyer

Eddie Guerrero and Chris Benoit were just two WCW's wrestlers who soured Bischoff on cruiserweight wrestling. When Bischoff told an unhappy Eddie and Benoit they could take their talents elsewhere, they took them to the WWF, along with Perry Saturn and Dean Malenko.

who gathered the talent from ECW, Japan, and Mexico.

Before long, however, WCW fans—and the cruiserweights themselves—started demanding more exposure on *Monday Nitro*, *Thunder*, and on major pay-per-views. The situation became so tense that Bischoff attempted to nip it in the bud by offering the cruiserweights (or any other disaffected talent) a way out of WCW.

In a 1999 talent meeting, Bischoff told his employees that if they were so unhappy with the current conditions, they were free to leave ... and several high-profile cruiserweights—most famously Eddie Guerrero, Chris Benoit, Perry Saturn, and Dean Malenko, did exactly that—jumping to the rival WWF.

Today in TNA, fan reaction to the X division, which is a de facto cruiserweight bracket, brings back bitter memories of the WCW fiasco for Bischoff. Once again, he is being forced to act against his beliefs by featuring X division wrestlers in prominent spots on TNA cards. Having been burned by the WCW cruiserweight exodus, he is understandably distrustful of the X division wrestlers. Allowing the fans, or anybody else, to influence the way TNA is run simply doesn't jibe with his solipsistic view.

Still, the current situation with TNA's X division isn't the sole cause of Bischoff's prickly personality. Indeed, there are other factors at work. One is Bischoff's very nature. If we've learned anything about Bischoff over the years, it's that he's a control freak who will go out of his way to wreck anything over which he does not hold absolute power. Ironically, the X division is his baby. He has been charged with running it, and run it he will ... right into the ground.

The same poor attitude apparently governs how Bischoff interacts with the heavyweights as well. It is hardly a coincidence that each time a TNA World champion or title contender gathers any momentum, Bischoff publicly confronts him, seemingly to cut him off at the knees before he can amass enough influence to challenge his authority.

Others who've known Bischoff over the years also point to a certain level of professional angst that gnaws at him. It's no secret that he's always dreamed of owning his own wrestling company. Some say he remains bitter after he and a group of investors (collectively known as Fusient Media) unsuccessfully attempted to buy WCW from Turner Broadcasting in 2000. Of course, the deal fell through, McMahon swept in, and the rest is history. Hence the friction with TNA President Dixie Carter, whose family holds majority ownership of the company. Could it be that Bischoff is acting out over the realization that he's risen as high as he can in TNA?

Regardless of why Bischoff feels and acts the way he does, the fact remains that he in fact has nothing to be angry about. He is still a rich man in a position of great power in one of the top two wrestling promotions in the world. Millions of people, and not just wrestling insiders, would happily trade places with him.

"I can't understand why Eric's such an unhappy guy. But he just radiates venom and bile," said a TNA co-worker who requested anonymity. "In fact, there's sort of an inside joke around here that says whoever wins the title has to face Bischoff in his first defense."

A funny line, yes, but also indicative of the corrosive effect Bischoff's demeanor is having on the wrestlers he doesn't like (which is seemingly everyone). Naturally, no TNA wrestlers are queuing up to show Bischoff how his abrasive disposition and general unhappiness threaten to ruin the X division—one of TNA's greatest assets—and do untold damage to the company itself.

Hey, Eric, ease up. ☐

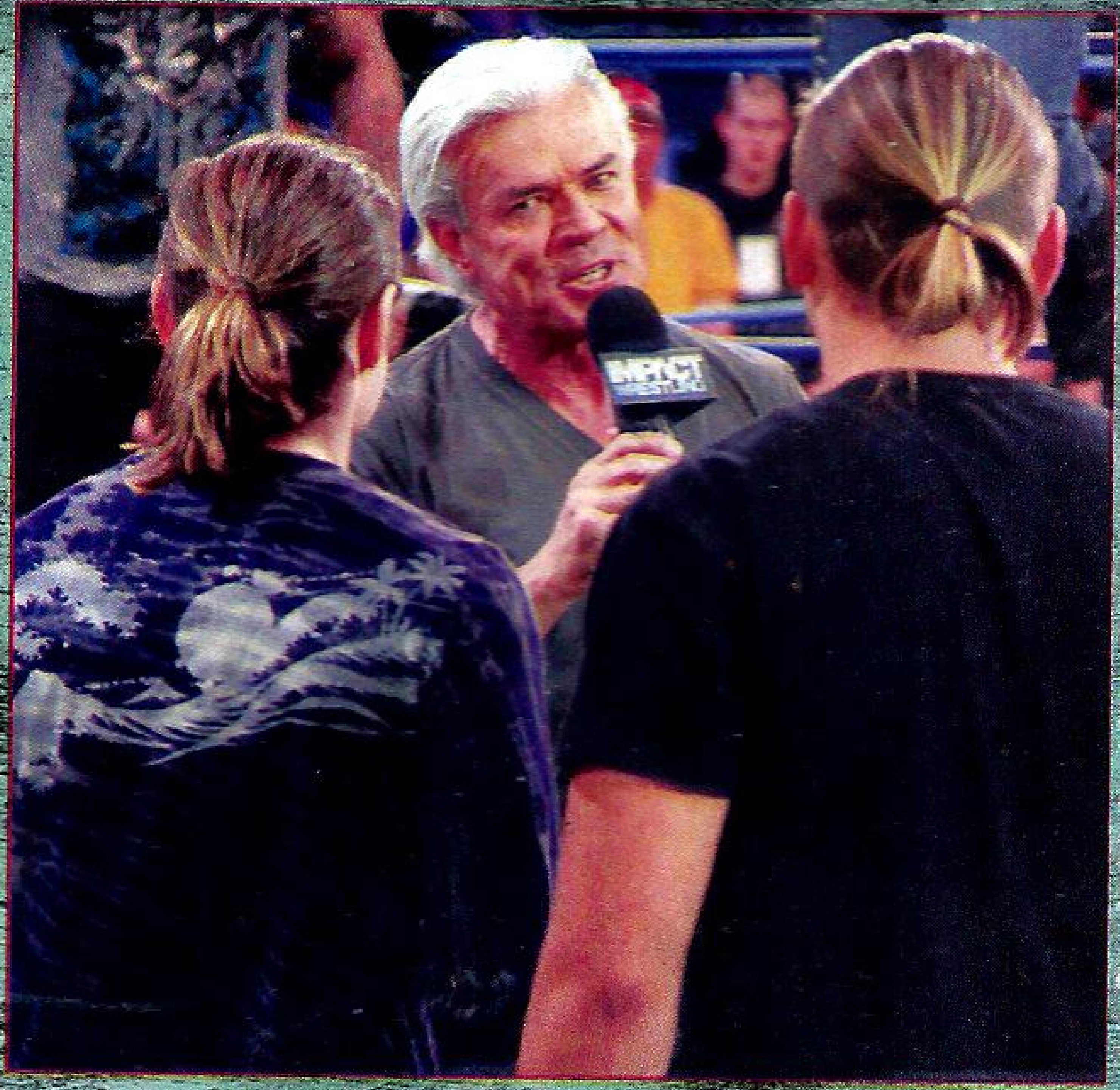


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

With the notion of pushing X division wrestlers running counter to Bischoff's promotional philosophy, what will come of Brian Kendrick and Jeremy Buck remains to be seen.

Cena's STF has Punk on the verge of submission, and Triple-H is perfectly positioned to view the action. Punk was able to summon enough strength to kick Cena off of him and onto the ring apron.

THE LAMEST TITLE WIN EVER!

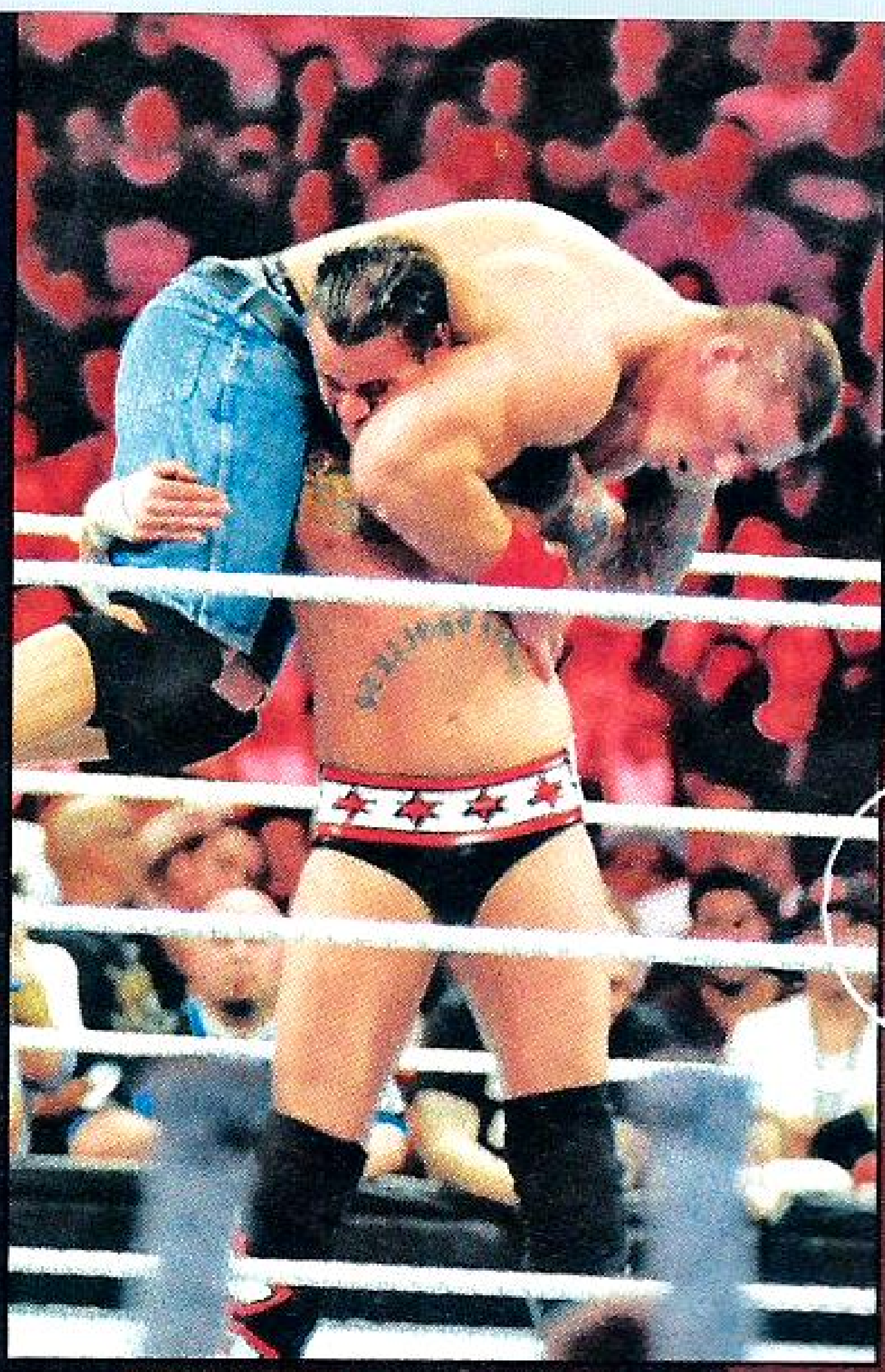
DEL RIO MAKES A TOTAL NASH OF HIMSELF

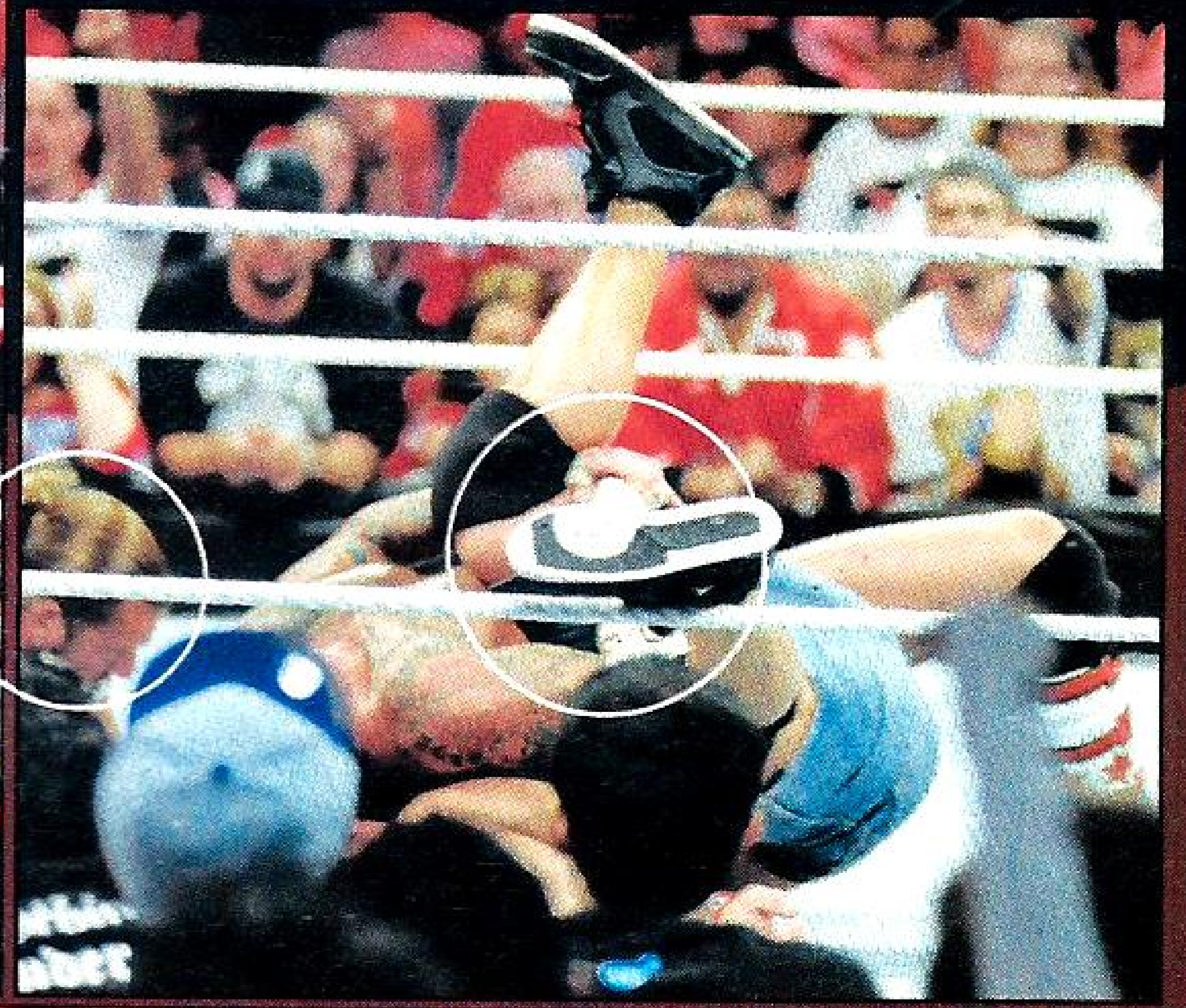
By **Dave Lenker** Photos by **George Napolitano**

ALBERTO DEL RIO THINKS HIS DESTINY BECAME REALITY WHEN HE "WON" THE WWE TITLE AT SUMMERSLAM. TO JUST ABOUT EVERYONE ELSE, IT LOOKED LIKE HE WAS AFRAID HIS QUEST TO WIN THE TITLE WAS DESTINED TO FAIL

SOUTH OF THE border, legend has it that Alberto Del Rio is quite the sportsman in his native land. Whenever he has a free day or two, whitetail deer become his trophy of choice. Only he doesn't head out to the open plains with bow and arrow in hand, hoping that a big buck will soon scamper into his sightline. No, Del Rio hires some local wildlife experts to tranquilize and capture about a dozen of the biggest whitetails you've ever seen and bring them to the yard right behind one of his mansions. Del Rio then sets up 20-foot-high barriers all around a small patch of property, and loads up a bazooka. You see, it's his destiny to be the greatest hunter who ever lived.

Del Rio is also an avid fisherman when his schedule permits. But he doesn't care to troll off the coast of Florida in search of a real fight with one of the biggest, meanest marlins you'll find anywhere on this planet. He prefers to hire a local ichthyologist to haul some fat, juicy fish to his home swimming pool located





After several near-falls, Punk is able to snare Cena in the GTS (far left) and get a full three-count (left). Although the photo is somewhat obscured by ringsiders, two things are very clear: Cena's foot is on the bottom rope and Triple-H missed it entirely.

Punk refused Triple-H's handshake after the victory, but the WWE COO raises his hand in victory anyway. Hunter wouldn't discover his error until he reviewed the tapes later that night.

CM PUNK
CM PUNK
PUN

just off the back porch of his home before dropping his baited line in the water. Something about his destiny to prove himself as the world's greatest fisherman, you understand.

You just wouldn't believe how adroitly he bags those deer and reels in those fish.

And you can almost believe that we didn't just make up these Mexican legends, huh? That's because Del Rio's WWE title victory over CM Punk at the conclusion of SummerSlam was the wrestling equivalent of hunting deer with a bazooka in a backyard that you've made entirely inescapable or landing fish in your abundantly stocked swimming pool. Although the parties involved are all denying it, it seems all but certain that Del Rio arranged for Nash to soften up Punk at the conclusion of his match against Cena.

The title "win" was hardly worth the ink that will be needed to print a tiny entry in next year's *PWI Almanac* recording this title change. Since the Money in the Bank concept was introduced in WWE in 2005, it has become synonymous with opportunism. Win one of those MITB ladder matches and you are entitled to cash in the title shot you earned on any card during the next 365 days. Edge set the precedent six years ago by winning the brutal MITB bout at WrestleMania 21, then teased and tantalized us all while waiting nine months before easily defeating John Cena for the WWE gold at New Year's Revolution immediately after Cena had just triumphed in a grueling "Hell In A Cell" title bout.

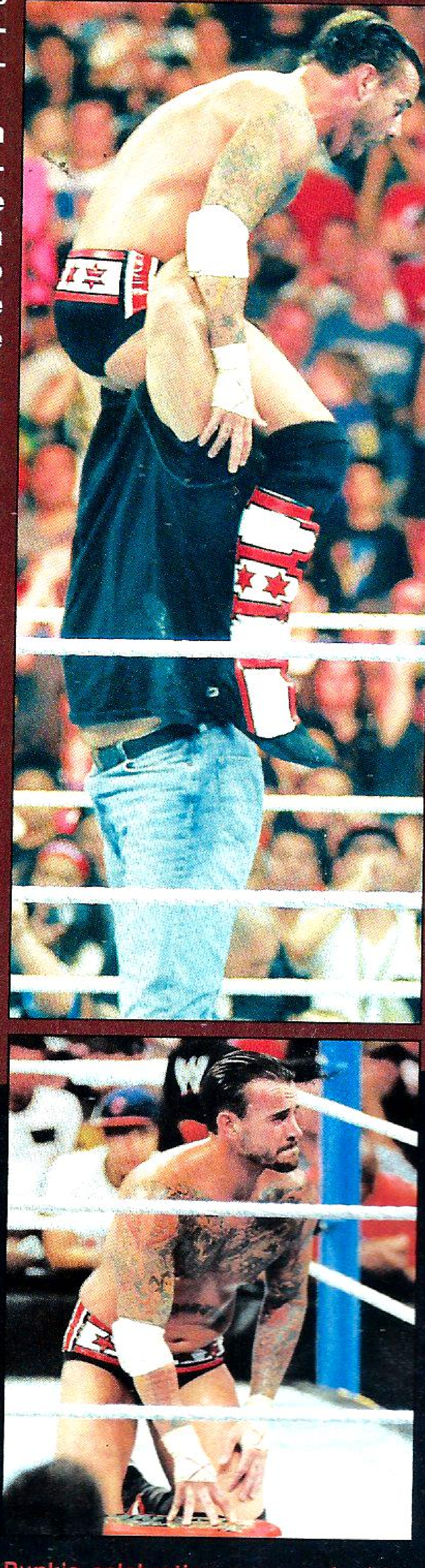
All told, 10 men have now won MITB ladder matches. Daniel Bryan has vowed to cash in his title shot at WrestleMania 28. Rob Van Dam announced his intention to cash in his shot at the ECW One Night Stand PPV ahead of time and ultimately did so in 2006. Seven others won either the WWE or World title by defeating a weakened champion. All of those shifty opportunists can now feel free to look down their noses at "Mr. Destiny" with scorn and shame.

The best thing we can say about Del Rio is at least he bothered to exert the energy required to land a kick to the back of Punk's head before covering him in that 12-second "match."

Joe Superfan in the 18th row could have held Punk's shoulders to the mat for a count of three after Nash did his damage.

The new fresh, slick, uber-hip image that Punk is cultivating for himself—well, that and the fact that he was a bit nefarious himself in twice cashing in MITB title shots in the past—stopped him from whining about the bum deal immediately afterward or even the next night on *Raw*, but in this case, whining would have been quite appropriate.

Destiny? Right. If the WWE title was destined to be his, did Del Rio really need an assist from Nash ... or anyone for that matter? We don't care who texted whom on whose phone or what lame explanations about miscommunication and not being on the same page that Triple-H or Nash or Ricardo Rodriguez or Vince McMahon himself might care to offer—there is zero chance that Del Rio was not involved in this fiasco. *Hmmmmmm*, if that huge hunk of gold was Del Rio's destiny (i.e., inevitable), why didn't he just walk away at the end of SummerSlam and wait for even a slightly more fair and honorable opportunity to take possession of it?



Punk's celebration was crashed by Kevin Nash, who presumably on Del Rio's behalf, unleashed a vicious assault (top). Del Rio cashed in his MITB briefcase and took the undisputed WWE title, leaving Punk wondering how his fortunes had changed so quickly (above).

Maybe it was because destiny bought a front-row ticket to WrestleMania 27 at the Georgia Dome earlier this year, ready to rendezvous with Del Rio as he took on Edge for the World title, but then she unexpectedly borrowed a chapter from the book of her distant cousin, Fate, became a little fickle, and changed the script.

'Mania was surely shaping up to be the coronation for Del Rio, but the retiring Edge was having none of it. And then spring turned to summer and Del Rio's momentum, save for the MITB briefcase win in July, stalled. Punk even made relatively easy work of him six days before SummerSlam.

Destiny ... meet your replacement: Desperation.

No matter what happens from here, that *PWI Almanac* will always indicate that Del Rio captured his first WWE title on August 14, 2011, and fans the world over will always remember that it was as cheap a win as a man can get. And they'll think of that before they think about what a great wrestler Del Rio genuinely is.

Del Rio might want to ask Jack Swagger how his decision to cash in his MITB title shot shortly after WrestleMania 26 to win the World title from a weakened Chris Jericho has worked out for him.

Swagger was a young star on the rise at that point, and he captured the big belt for the first time under similar circumstances. By the time WrestleMania 27 rolled around, he was training Michael Cole for a match with Jerry Lawler. Swagger may yet rebound and thrive, but for now, he hardly looks like a big part of WWE's future.

Surely Del Rio doesn't want to be staring at that kind of destiny ... even if it's the destiny he deserves. □

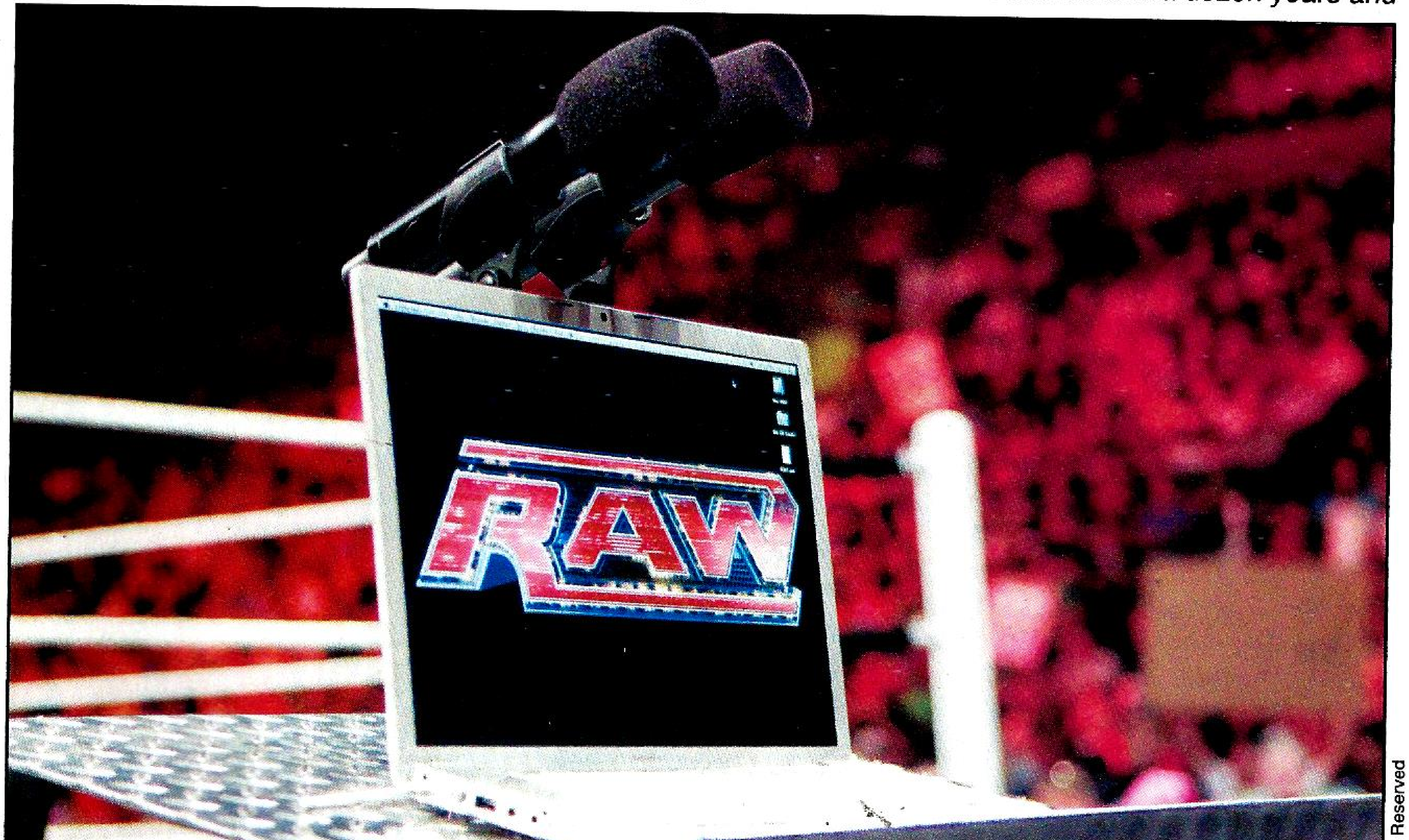
WWE SHOULD HAVE BROUGHT THE ANONYMOUS GM SITUATION TO A CONCLUSION

> **"Angles can go in so many directions depending on how they're featured, presented, and planned. But it's incumbent upon WWE to wrap up any storyline it introduces. Is that too much to ask?"**
>
> **—Al Alven**

ONE OF THE most trusted ways of generating fan interest and a collective rage against one central, villainous figure is for a promotion to appoint a figurehead to rule over the realm and make unpopular decisions. However, the promotion runs the risk of alienating the very fan base it looks to incite if it chooses an inordinately unpopular figure. The solution, naturally, is quite simple: Surround that figure in a shroud of secrecy.

WWE has gone this route before in its past when a secret hand known only as the "Higher Power" was pulling the strings behind a particularly vindictive Undertaker and The Corporate Ministry faction in 1999. The build-up was intense, and the letdown equally so when it was revealed, unsurprisingly, that Vince McMahon was the man behind the cloak. Expectations that once ran very high were suddenly at an all-time low and the cleverness of such an angle was lost.

Fast forward a dozen years and



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So, who was Raw's anonymous general manager all these months? Guess we'll never know. The entire Raw GM program seems to have been abandoned or at least put on hold, which some of our editors feel was unfair to WWE fans.

WWE was back at it, only this time the mystery was over who was the anonymous Raw general manager pulling the strings via e-mail on WWE's flagship broadcast. Yet, unlike in 1999, WWE did not allow the angle to meet such an unsatisfying demise because, quite simply, it just went away.

WWE should have brought the anonymous general manager situation to a conclusion, regardless of the response. Publisher Stu Saks sat down with Senior Writers Harry Burkett, Dan Murphy, and Contributing Writer Al Alven to ponder what might—and, perhaps, should—have been.

Although he was only the messenger who read the anonymous GM's e-mails on *Raw*, having the unpopular Michael Cole in that role probably did little to help endear the angle to fans.

Photo by George Napolitano

STU SAKS: For a large chunk of this year, the fans of WWE were held captive by sound effects and a laptop computer on a podium. Rarely are the keys to the castle handed over in such a manner and, yet, the anonymous general manager angle on *Raw* dominated the action. And, as suddenly and strangely as it started, it was gone. Did WWE owe its fans more than that?

AL ALVEN: Stu, WWE absolutely owed the fan base more than what was delivered, which was nothing. It's as if fans were told the set-up to an elaborate joke ... but never given the punchline. For such an insufferable angle there should have been at least some payoff for the fans.

DAN MURPHY: I agree with Al. To take it a bit further, the anonymous GM basically carried the weight—for better or worse—during a historically slow period for WWE. It was made an integral part of the company solely to keep up interest in the hopes of some grand revelation.

SAKS: True, but couldn't the "payoff" that Al speaks of and you seconded be the fact that the GM angle kept everyone engaged prior to the big payoff of CM Punk and John Cena's feud?

HARRY BURKETT: I tend to agree with your last point, Stu. The anonymous GM was simply the opening act for a much bigger show. The only thing that makes the GM angle unsatisfying is the simple fact that the anonymity was played up to the extent that it was. Were it a person in that position, the fans likely wouldn't have the type of animosity they may have had. Plus, by my estimation, the day that Triple-H was first presented as the official corporate shot-caller, the entire GM angle became moot. Still, I'm okay with letting the angle go at this point.

ALVEN: True, Harry, but even in situations where the computer was an actual person, there always was some sort of public sendoff, be it a firing or a beatdown. Even though the laptop was destroyed—on multiple occasions, mind you—it still didn't have the type of conclusion the angle required.

> **"I have a feeling that years from now, people will look back on this angle and laugh, mostly because it never really had an ending."**
> **—Harry Burkett**

SAKS: Which should have been?

ALVEN: Huh? Obviously, letting everybody know who was sending the e-mails all along.

MURPHY: And—jumping off of Al's point—that person did not have to be revealed as some one-shot superstar or legend. I think what's lost in the argument is that WWE painted itself into a very small corner with this angle. If it was revealed to be someone with name recognition—like a Kevin Nash or a Ric Flair—the excitement may spike initially, but it would certainly not be sustainable because they're not "new" to the company, per se.

BURKETT: Right, and if it was revealed to be someone currently on the roster—Triple-H or any of the McMahons—then WWE would be lambasted for taking the easy route and simply relying on old shtick and old faces.

MURPHY: Exactly.

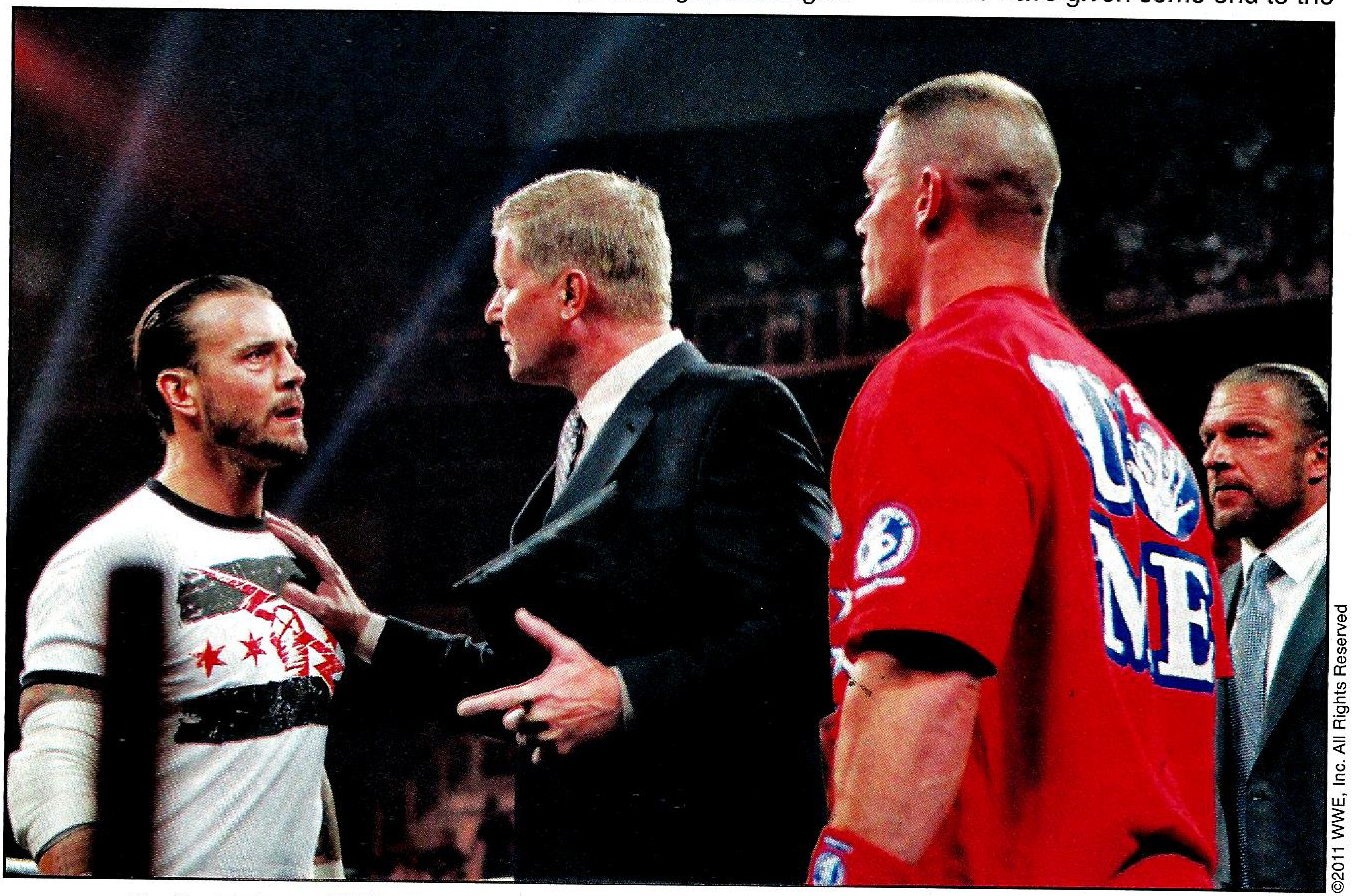
ALVEN: Fine, but I'm still not convinced that you don't give the angle a more proper conclusion simply because it could've gone either way. Angles can go in so many directions depending on how they're featured, presented, and planned. But it's incumbent on WWE to wrap up any storyline it introduces. Is that too much to ask?

SAKS: I hear your point, Al, and I don't disagree. But this angle could be far from dead despite not being featured. With the reaction being what it was, could you truly fault WWE for not wanting to revisit it, especially given the popularity of the Cena-Punk-management angle?

MURPHY: I don't blame them at all. If anything, I'd love to see it nonchalantly mentioned in passing. To me, that would give just enough closure to the entire scenario while not diverting any time, resources, or attention away from the primary angles.

BURKETT: Agreed. There's not much left to revisit with the angle, especially given the way that the pecking order has been elevated on *Raw*. We're not talking about a competing general manager in the flesh, but rather a corporate influence with Triple-H and John Laurinaitis. In a perfect world, where all three existed in living color, the general manager would be a distant third in terms of power. It's basically a non-factor at this point aside from basic human curiosity.

SAKS: Well put. Now, let's play revisionist history for a moment or two. There seems to be a consensus, to varying degrees, that WWE should have given some end to the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The feud between CM Punk and John Cena, John Laurinaitis, and Triple-H not only created buzz for WWE, it also gave Creative the cover it needed to let the Raw GM storyline die a silent death. Had WWE revealed any of the four men to be Raw's anonymous GM, perhaps it would have given the fans the satisfying conclusion they deserved.

anonymous GM angle. I want to know, how would you have ended it if given the opportunity.

ALVEN: Honestly, Stu, I don't really have a preference as to how it would've been done. I suppose it would've been easiest to make it a one-off appearance of someone who was both out of the spotlight but with a vested interest in WWE. I wouldn't go as mindless as the "who is Mr. McMahon's son" route from a few years back, but at the same time I feel that something with even a moment's worth of shock value would've been fine.

MURPHY: I've already alluded to what would've worked for me, so I'll take it a step further in that I would have liked it to be revealed that it was a Kevin Nash or Triple-H or even Stephanie McMahon behind the keyboard, but only as a side issue to the primary angle—a piece of the overall master plan, but not something to be revisited in any sort of substantive detail.

BURKETT: I see everyone's points, but I'm going to stick to my guns and say that I'm fine with WWE letting it die on the vine. If anything, history has shown that goofy angles will often develop a myth all their own after some time. I have a feeling that years from now people will look back on this angle and laugh, mostly because it never really had an ending.

SAKS: All valid points and perhaps history will end up being the greatest judge of the niche success of the anonymous Raw general manager. Thanks, guys. ☐

Photo by Vern Verna

It wasn't so long ago that Vince McMahon revealed himself to be the "higher power" behind Undertaker's Corporate Ministry ... to a rather ho-hum response from WWF fans. Perhaps that is the reason WWE chose to leave the Raw GM storyline open-ended.

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ROLL CALL OF CHAMPIONS

For period ended August 26, 2011

Championships highlighted in bold on the "Roll Call Of Champions" have changed hands since our previous issue. The information under the championship listing indicates the date that champion won the title, who the former champion was, and where the match took place.

ALL JAPAN UNIFIED TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: KEIJI MUTO & KENSO
(June 19, 2011; beat Akebono & Ryota Hama for vacant title; Tokyo, Japan)

ALL JAPAN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KAI
(June 19, 2011; beat Shuji Kondo for vacant title; Tokyo, Japan)

ALL JAPAN TRIPLE CROWN CHAMPION: SUWAMA
(August 29, 2010; from Ryota Hama; Tokyo, Japan)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: PAPADON
(March 5, 2011; from Mega; Newark, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION MID-ATLANTIC CHAMPION: CHRIS WYLDE
(December 4, 2010; won battle royal for vacant title, last eliminating Mozart Fontaine; Newark, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: MATT SAIGON & DAMIEN DRAGON
(May 7, 2011; beat Christopher Rockwell & Sam Shields for vacant title; Newark, DE)

FCW FLORIDA HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: BO ROTUNDO
(May 19, 2011; from Lucky Cannon; Tampa, FL)

FCW FLORIDA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: CJ PARKER & DONNY MARLOWE
(July 21, 2011; from Calvin Raines & Big E Langston; Miami, FL)

FCW FLORIDA DIVAS CHAMPION: AKSANA
(April 7, 2011; from AJ Lee; Tampa, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: VACANT
(April 12, 2011; title vacated by Jon Moxley)

FULL IMPACT PRO TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: JON DAVIS & KORY CHAVIS
(July 31, 2010; from Chris Gray & Tommy Taylor; Crystal River, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO FLORIDA HERITAGE CHAMPION: JAKE MANNING
(July 31, 2010; from Brad Allen; Crystal River, FL)

IWGP HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: HIROSHI TANAHASHI
(January 4, 2011; from Satoshi Kojima; Tokyo, Japan)

IWGP INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: GIANT BERNARD & KARL ANDERSON
(June 19, 2010; from Wataru Inoue & Yuji Nagata; Osaka, Japan)

IWGP JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KOTA IBUSHI
(June 18, 2011; from Prince Devitt; Osaka, Japan)

NWA HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: ADAM PEARCE
(July 31, 2011; beat Chance Prophet, Jimmy Rave, and Shaun Tempers in four-way for vacant title; Columbus, OH)

NWA JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: VACANT
(July 11, 2011; Craig Classic vacated title)

NWA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: KORY CHAVIS & JON DAVIS
(May 15, 2011; from A.J. Steele & Murder-One; Warner Robins, GA)

NWA WOMEN'S CHAMPION: TASHA SIMONE
(November 6, 2010; beat Rachel for vacant title; Lebanon, TX)

OVW HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: JAYSON WAYNE
(July 2, 2011; beat Mike Mondo in tournament final; Louisville, KY)

OVW SOUTHERN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: ROCCO BELLAGIO & JAMES THOMAS
(August 6, 2011; from Trailer Park Trash & Mr. Black; Louisville, KY)

OVW TV CHAMPION: PARADYSE
(July 20, 2011; from Rudy Switchblade; Louisville, KY)

OVW WOMEN'S CHAMPION: LADY JOJO
(August 24, 2011; from Izza Belle Smothers; Louisville, KY)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA CHAMPION: KEVIN STEEN
(July 23, 2011; from Claudio Castagnoli; Reseda, CA)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: THE YOUNG BUCKS
(April 9, 2011; from Paul London & El Generico; Reseda, CA)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN CHAMPION: GO SHIOZAKI
(July 10, 2011; from Takashi Sugiura; Tokyo, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KOTARO SUZUKI
(December 5, 2010; from Yoshinobu Kanemaru; Osaka, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: GIANT BERNARD & KARL ANDERSON
(June 18, 2011; from Takuma Sano & Yoshihiro Takayama; Osaka, Japan)

RING OF HONOR CHAMPION: DAVEY RICHARDS
(June 26, 2011; from Eddie Edwards; New York, NY)

RING OF HONOR TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: SHELTON BENJAMIN & CHARLIE HAAS
(April 1, 2011; from Chris Hero & Claudio Castagnoli; Atlanta, GA)

RING OF HONOR TV CHAMPION: JAY LETHAL
(August 13, 2011; from El Generico; Chicago Ridge, IL)

SHIMMER CHAMPION: MADISON EAGLES
(April 11, 2010; from MsChif; Berwyn, IL)

TNA TV CHAMPION: ERIC YOUNG
(May 17, 2011; from Gunner; Orlando, FL)

TNA KNOCKOUTS CHAMPION: MICKIE JAMES
(August 25, 2011; from Winter; Huntsville, AL)

TNA KNOCKOUTS TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: MISS TESSMACHER & TARA
(July 12, 2011; from Sarita & Rosita; Orlando, FL)

TNA WORLD CHAMPION: KURT ANGLE
(August 7, 2011; from Sting, Orlando, FL)

TNA WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: HERNANDEZ & ANARQUIA
(August 9, 2011; from Robert Roode & James Storm; Orlando, FL)

TNA X DIVISION CHAMPION: BRIAN KENDRICK
(July 10, 2011; from Abyss; Orlando, FL)

WWE INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPION: CODY RHODES
(August 19, 2011; from Ezekiel Jackson; Sacramento, CA)

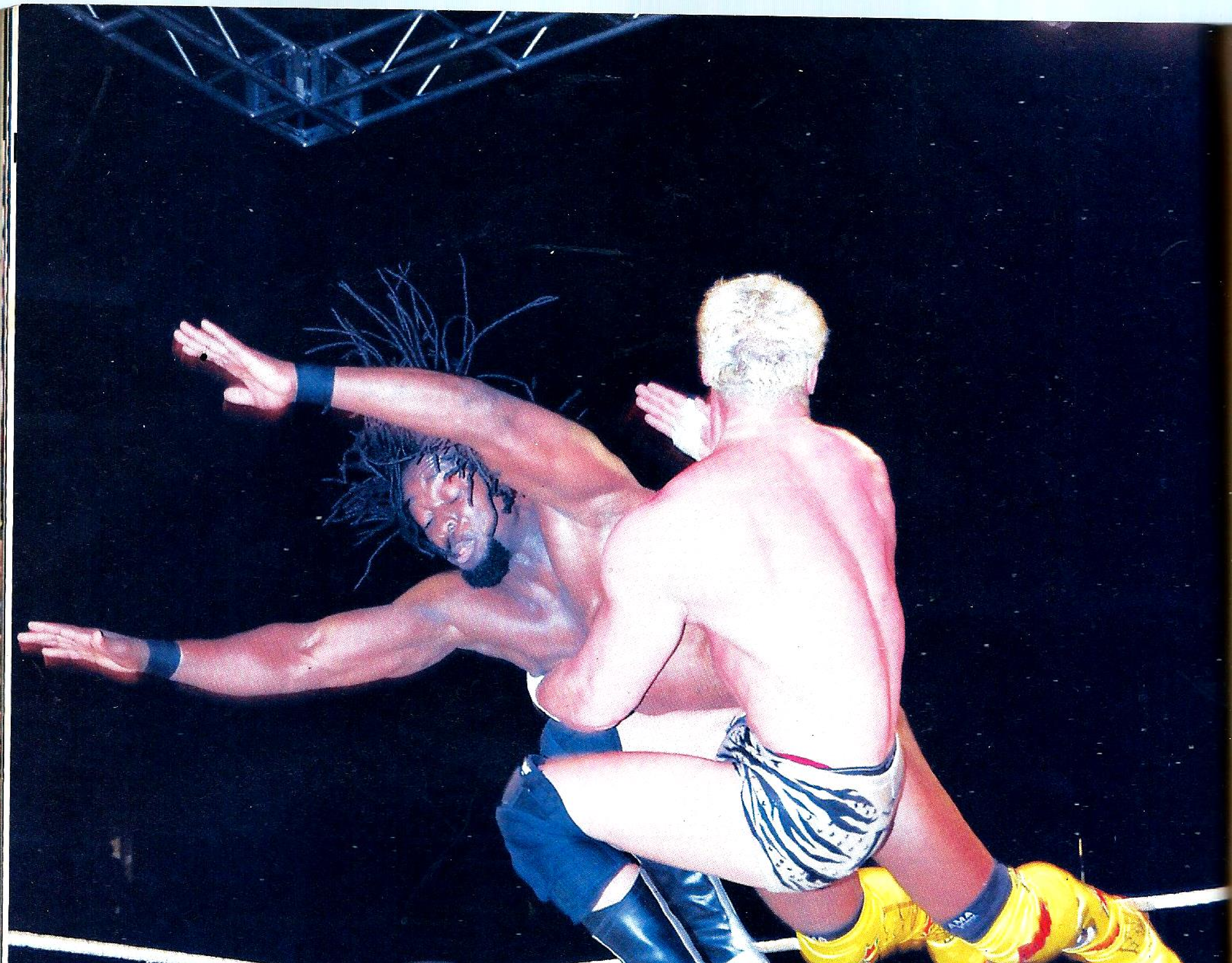
WWE WORLD CHAMPION: RANDY ORTON
(August 14, 2011; from Christian; Los Angeles, CA)

WWE TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: EVAN BOURNE & KOFI KINGSTON
(August 22, 2011; from David Otunga & Michael McGillicutty; Edmonton, AB)

WWE CHAMPION: ALBERTO DEL RIO
(August 14, 2011; from CM Punk; Los Angeles, CA)

WWE U.S. CHAMPION: DOLPH ZIGGLER
(June 19, 2011; from Kofi Kingston; Washington DC)

WWE DIVAS CHAMPION: KELLY KELLY
(June 27, 2011; from Brie Bella; Las Vegas, NV)



check out this shot!

It isn't very often that people refer to a wrestler being defensively aggressive, but that seems to describe Dolph Ziggler's actions in this photo. Rather than wait to absorb the impact of this splash from Kofi Kingston, Ziggler wisely decided to offset the maneuver in mid-air. Wonder if Vickie Guerrero taught him to do that.

Photo by George Napolitano